

The Big Four and the School for Witchcraft and Wizardry

by theohbm

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Summary: Big Four Hogwarts AU. It all begins with four letters. From these letters four students of Hogwarts will meet and form a bond that is more significant than any of them could imagine. It is through this bond that they will unite to face a growing darkness that threatens the entire world. It is through his bond that they will become the Big Four. HIJACK, Merida/OC, Rapunzel/Flynn

1. The Letters

(Author's note: Hello readers, just so you know this is my first fanfic so please bear with me if the writing is a little off. I do appreciate reviews and advice if you're willing to give them but other than that I hope you enjoy the story) :)

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* * *

><p>The Letters

The letter found Merida at her home in the Scottish Highlands. Her mother Elinor had come running into the kitchen waving the letter in the air triumphantly "although still in a dignified fashion.

'Merida, it's the letter! You're in,' she cried, happily dragging Merida out of her seat and hugging her.

'Wha'!' Merida gasped, a few crumbs flying from her mouth, 'I can actually go?'

'O' course lass' cried her father Fergus as he rose from his own seat

to pull Merida into his own excited hug. 'I'm so proud o' my kids' he continued happily while behind him the triplets were taking advantage of the sudden distraction to sneak as many cakes as they could from the table.

Later on when the excitement had died down Merida was left alone in her room with the letter from Hogwarts all to herself. _No more lessons with mum, _she thought to herself as she reread the letter again, _No more of the same old boring rules and expectations._ She pumped her fist into the air and quietly but excitedly hissed 'Yes!'

When she was a child Merida had loved to explore the woods around her home and play with the wisps that inhabited it. One day, though, the wisps had taken her back out of the forest to her mother where they had been attacked by the demon bear Mordu who had been tracking Merida from the shadows of the trees.

They had only just been saved by her father who had barrelled in with wand and sword drawn. He fought the enormous beast off and sent it back to whatever dark place it had emerged from, but at the cost of his leg.

Since then Fergus had walked with a peg leg and Merida had been home schooled by her mother. The next years had been nothing but arduous hours, trapped in cold rooms, where she was forced to learn line after line of history, literature and whatever else her mother thought she should learn.

She had also spent many a painful hour when her mother tried day after day to tame Merida's fiery, tangled mop of hair with comb, brush and magic but to no avail. Merida's hair always stayed stubbornly sticking in every direction and left her mother in nearly despairing tears and Merida with the feeling that her scalp was being stabbed.

Then she became a sister when the triplets were born, they got away with murder, attacking the poor housemaids and anyone else holding a plate of buns with all sorts of devious tricks. Merida couldn't get away with anything, her mother always kept her locked up teaching her how to behave like a 'proper' witch.

The only solace she found where in the lessons her dad gave her. Fergus' teachings were never in classrooms; instead he would take Merida outside and teach her swordsmanship, archery and all other kinds of amazing things (he'd even taken her falconing once but never again when both his and her birds had done nothing but attack his own face). In these lessons of activity and energy Merida had found herself but she wanted more " magic.

Every child who grew up in a magical family wanted to learn magic of their own and Merida was no exception. Her parents had told her of the amazing magic school Hogwarts and that one day they would send a letter for her. They themselves had waited for the day when Merida would be called with as much anticipation as she had " although for darker reasons.

In the meantime, Merida could cheer excitedly because, at last, she could start to make her own fate.

* * *

><p>The letter found Hiccup in his hometown of Berk, the northernmost wizard-only village in the United Kingdom. It was a sturdy village on an island twelve days north of Hopeless and a few degrees south of freezing to death. It was renowned as the greatest dragon taming village on Earth, followed closely by the institute in Romania.<p>

Hiccup had been in the forge he had once shared with Gobber working on a new saddle mechanism for Toothless when Tiny, a Terrible Terror dragon whose species were now being used by the Berk people as a replacement for owls, flew in through the window and dropped it on his head. Hiccup put down his tools and picked it up, looked it over and read it. Then he read it again.

Hiccup leaped out of the doors in a full run whooping with delight while Tiny flew behind him puffing smoke excitedly. He ran past and around several people on their ways to work, nearly knocking a few over before running across the wooden bridge leading to the dragon training pit. Originally the pit had been caged so dragons couldn't escape but that had been removed to turn the pit into a perfect dragon pen.

'Dad, dad!' he yelled happily as he descended into the arena, 'It's Hogwarts; I'm in!'

He stopped with Tiny settling on his shoulder as he saw a group of people in a huddle that consisted of all his training partners, his dad and several older members of the village. Hiccup noticed that all the young members had letters identical to his.

'Really, _you _got in?' Ruffnut (female twin) said mockingly.

'Of course he did. They lowered the standards when they let _you _in' retorted Tuffnut (male twin) who was then concussed by a bucket thrown by Ruffnut.

'You _all_ got one too' he said incredulously " _of course they had_ he thought, _ it's not like I'm any more special than they are_.

'Aye you've done well son' Stoic said encouragingly, coming over to give Hiccup a gentle slap on the back that nearly sent the skinny boy sprawling on the floor, 'And after all you and yer friends have done for the village I can only imagine what you'd do for the school' " _burn it down probably, _ he thought privately.

'I don' suppose' he continued innocently, 'that you'd think o' leaving Toothless here?'

'What, leave Toothless!' Hiccup gasped. All of a sudden there was a general scramble in the group behind Stoic with yells of 'Night Fury!' and 'Get down!' as Toothless, having heard his name, came jumping down and landed on some of the slower Berkians. 'How could I leave Toothless dad?' Hiccup asked, laughing as the dragon nuzzled him.

Stoic nodded understandingly, you couldn't separate those two now with several spells and a team of Gronkels pulling them apart. He

knew he'd have to write to the headmaster explaining the situation and asking for special permission, he wasn't looking forward to it.

Stoic had met Hiccup's mother, a muggle, outside of Berk and had slowly introduced her to his world, teaching her the ways of his village and how it was the only wall of defence between one of the largest dragon nests and the muggle world further south.

Unfortunately it didn't last as Hiccup's mother died when giving birth to him; she named him Hiccup as a sort of gift in the hopes of preventing Stoic giving him something worse as was the tradition of Berk.

Stoic had been left alone to raise his son to be a true warrior and leader so that he could follow in Stoic's footsteps. It was surprising then that Hiccup had aged into a skinny and inquisitive boy so unlike his father. Stoic had apprenticed him to Gobber in the hopes that he would know how to raise Hiccup in a way that Stoic hadn't thought of.

Hiccup for his part had wanted to be just like his father, a dragon killer renowned throughout the world. That is until one of his latest dragon capturing devices had actually caught a night fury, the most elusive dragon. He had hunted it down in the hopes of proving himself to his father but at the crucial moment he couldn't do it. He'd cut the ropes that bound it and let it escape.

After that he and the other recruits had been trained by Gobber, as magic was illegal for underage wizards to use (and in any case practically useless against dragons) it was customary for Berk soldiers to train with all manner of weapons and shields. After the first lesson Hiccup had felt something was off with the Night Fury; a dragon would always go for the kill, so why didn't he?

He'd tracked it down to a small hollow in the forest and discovered he'd damaged its tail leaving it unable to fly. Over time he'd bonded with the dragon, bringing him fish and naming him Toothless for the way he could retract his fangs.

As the months went by he trained with Toothless to learn to fly together using a saddle and prosthetic tail fin he invented. Toothless also helped teach him many harmless ways of taking down a dragon that helped to bring Hiccup fame amongst the villagers.

It didn't last however as he discovered not only the location of the dragons' nest but the terrible Hive dragon that controlled all the others and then Stoic had discovered his relationship with Toothless.

Long story short Hiccup had had to save Toothless from his father on the shores of the dragons' nest and then with Toothless save the village from the enormous Hive dragon.

They'd succeeded but Hiccup had lost a foot in the battle and had needed Gobber to fit him with a prosthetic limb of his own. It was funny really, now he and Toothless were only truly whole when they were together.

At the age of ten Hiccup had been the first dragon rider and the first to prove that everything the world knew about dragons was wrong. Since then he and his friends had helped to rebuild Berk to be a dragon taming village rather than a hunting one. Now, a year later, he was going on a new adventure to Hogwarts " and there was no way he'd be leaving Toothless behind.

* * *

><p>Rapunzel was never sent a letter from Hogwarts. She had been a special case and so had been given a visit from the head of the school himself. Professor Nicholas St North had asked if he could have a moment with her alone and, after her parents and the ever present aurors had left, he spoke to her in a serious but friendly voice.<p>

'Now miss Rapunzel why don't we get down to zhe tax of brass. You have an incredible skill that I have never seen before and that is very rare these days. I would like you to come study at my school, it is evident to anyone that you have magic and we could teach you to control it far more than you already can. What's more is we can keep you safe until zhis hole mess blows over, Hogwarts is very well protected you know' He added encouragingly.

Rapunzel had sat there, absentmindedly brushing her golden hair that ran down into a heap on the floor. Then she looked up, looked around as if to seek guidance from the universe itself, looked back at North and asked 'Will I get to make friends there?'

Professor Nicholas smiled back at her, hoping to disguise the sad twinge that creased his eyes, and replied 'Of course you will'

'Ok, can I bring Pascal?'

'Pascal?'

'He's on your shoulder'

'Bah!'

Rapunzel hadn't known her real parents as she grew up. Instead she'd been raised by Mother Gothel, a witch who had sung her the same song when she was a baby and taught it to her as a child. It was a song ingrained in Rapunzel's very heart as well as her special hair; it was a song about a flower.

Gothel had also forbidden her from leaving the tower that was their home because, as she put it, the world was a cruel place filled with terrible people.

Her only friend had been Pascal, a small chameleon whose egg had been laid in a small pocket in the bricks of the tower. He was far more intelligent than the rest of his kind (and some of human kind) and this had been because when Mother Gothel had enchanted the tower in defensive and cloaking spells his egg had accidentally absorbed the magic.

This gave Pascal greater intelligence but also had left a chink in the tower's defence and it was this chink that had let Rapunzel be discovered.

One year ago, when Mother Gothel had been away collecting hazelnuts, two aurors had discovered and broken into the tower that she shared with Rapunzel. They had been tracking the dark witch for years and, at the end of their search, were very surprised to find a little girl.

She had been excited at first to be taken out of the tower that she had never left all her life, until she discovered they weren't taking her back; then she began to think back on her mother's warnings. The aurors had rushed her back to the ministry of magic to make inquiries and had discovered that they had saved Rapunzel from a ten year old muggle kidnapping case.

They had taken her to see her parents but she had refused to believe they were telling the truth. As far as she was concerned Gothel was her mother and nothing would change that.

That is until they'd taken her to her room where the little cot still stood, it had a sundial with a pattern of a sun on the face. When Rapunzel saw it she had staggered back, bracing herself on the wall as images of all her paintings on the walls of the tower flashed before her eyes and the same sun pattern emerged in each one, hidden in plain sight.

She had run to her parents, embracing them and crying because she'd found a family but her old world in the tower with Gothel had crumbled around her. Later the aurors had sat her and her parents down and explained everything to them, including the existence of magic and the true nature of Mother Gothel.

Gothel was a dark witch, a very old and powerful woman with a black heart. She had explored all forms of dark magic in the pursuit of immortality, breaking several magical laws and had been pursued ever since. However, it seemed that according to Rapunzel she had achieved her goal because Rapunzel only knew her as a young woman with night black hair who always boasted about her youth and good looks.

The aurors then believed it had to have something to do with why she kidnapped Rapunzel.

As the debate went on Rapunzel had struggled with herself whether to tell the men about her secret. Gothel had told her never to reveal it, that it would bring nothing but trouble, but Gothel had told her a lot of things that turned out to be lies.

The aurors had asked her a lot of questions after she showed them and then sent for experts in the ministry and all top wizard hospitals, none of them could explain her gift. Only her father enlightened them when he talked about his desperation to find a cure for his pregnant wife's incurable disease.

During a walk to get some fresh air he'd gone off the track and had discovered a glowing golden flower growing at the edge of a cliff. The way it shined seemed to almost beg him to be given to his wife. The feeling had been so strong that he'd taken the flower back and fed it to Rapunzel's mother in a glowing broth. It had cured her and Rapunzel had been born with the same gold coloured hair.

Since her rescue Rapunzel's family had been kept under protective

custody by the aurors to ensure that Gothel wouldn't attack them to retrieve Rapunzel. They had to move house a lot and were never out of sight of at least one auror, for Rapunzel's parents it was worth it to finally have their lost daughter back, for Rapunzel it was like being stuck in the tower all over again.

But now, a year later, she was being offered a chance to see the world, or part of it, and Rapunzel felt at last that her life was about to begin.

* * *

><p>Jack wasn't sent a letter either; he'd in fact received an invitation to join a few years ago.<p>

Jack had been born into a strong line of winter mages on his father's side and simply a strong magical line on his mother's. Like the rest of his father's family Jack would be taught the secret family spells of ice and snow that no other wizard knew, if only he'd stay put and crack a book open every now and then.

He didn't like studying and far preferred running around outdoors and playing tricks on his little sister when she grew old enough. He wasn't really one for work; he liked to have fun instead.

So far in his life there had only been two occasions when Jack hadn't thought in his usual playful and happy way.

The first had been at his father's funeral where he'd been consumed with grief and sadness while his mother, holding his one year old sister, held back tears for both their sakes. His father had been an auror, a good one at that, and had died a 'hero's death' as his partner put it. He sacrificed his life in order to stop the dark wizard Pitch Black's attempt to kill all the most powerful wizards on Earth in order to gain their skill and magic, it had worked and Pitch had been imprisoned within the shadowed cells of Azkaban.

His father had only left him one thing, a book that contained all the secret spells of his family with a note that said 'You'll get the hang of them even if I can't be there to teach you. I'm proud of you'

The second time had been when he and his sister had gone skating over what turned out to be thin ice. He'd had to think seriously while his brain simultaneously panicked with the fear of falling into the killing water and the greater fear of his sister falling in. He came up with the idea to pretend to play a game of hopscotch and actually hoped a few paces across the slippery ice to get closer to his sister. He'd then encouraged her to the same 'Come on' he'd said, 'just one, twoâ€|three!' On three he leapt, grabbed his sister and threw her to safety, unfortunately that meant he had thrown himself further onto the ice and with a terrible crack it shattered under his feet.

All Jack remembered then was that it had been dark and cold and he had been scared, he knew he must be dying and it terrified him. Then the moon had shone through the ice, which was strange because it seemed like it had been day only a moment ago, and he wasn't scared any more.

His mother and sister remembered searching for him for hours along the icy edge of the lake until the moon had risen. It was then that tiny cracks slowly appeared in the ice, growing larger and into the form of a body until it fell away to reveal Jack floating into the air. He hung there for a moment, gasped deeply and fell back onto the reformed ice.

His mother used magic to lift his body over the fragile lake and move it over to them. She and his sister had brought him home and cared for him as well as they could until he woke up the next morning at which point they nearly suffocated him in hugs.

Jack was different after that, not in personality because nothing could change that, but in other ways. His once brown hair had turned a brilliant white and he had grown nearly immune to the cold.

His magic had also grown far stronger than it should be for a child his age; he began to create frost on any surface he touched and even began to call on frigid winds to carry him, although he hadn't been very good at it and kept crashing into trees or suddenly dropping from great heights. In short, the ice magic of his forefathers had somehow grown within him.

After an examination at St Mungos, Jack's mother had been informed that his magical power was overflowing and that he would need to learn to control this magic now before it consumed him. This was also when the professors from Hogwarts had arrived giving Jack a conditional entry when he turned of age and a letter from the ministry informing him that he was permitted to practice his magical talents in small quantities so long as it was not in view of the public.

It hadn't been that simple though. Jack's mother had needed to buy him a wand and hoped that would be the end of it but at Olivander's shop every wand had rejected her son.

'I might have some in the back' Olivander had said desperately, 'I'll just go and check'

'What about this?' Jack had replied, picking up a wizards staff in the shape of a shepherd's crook from the wall in the manner of someone who'll pick anything up to see what it did, if someone had written beside a red button 'End of the world button. DO NOT TOUCH!' the paint wouldn't have time to dry before Jack had pressed it.

'Oh that's just a staff. You wouldn't be able to use it. It requires special training and a lot of skill' Olivander explained as he scoured the shop for more wands.

Jack hadn't put it back though, when he picked it up the crook's centre had begun to glow a strange blue and ice began to form along the hilt, it had felt like it fit perfectly in his hand.

He'd played with it a bit, twirling it around until suddenly he clipped its end against the floor where ice began to appear in the exact same fern pattern that sprouted from Jack's fingers.

Olivander had dropped the wands he'd managed to scrounge in sheer shock.

'How incredible!' he'd exclaimed, 'and without any training'

'It's so easy. Who needs skill when you're me? Jack boasted proudly resting the staff on his shoulder.

And that was how Jack obtained his staff with Mr Olivander waving away any idea of money, 'It clearly belongs to him' he had said before turning back to his wand stacks still muttering 'Incredible' under his breath.

Since then Jack had done nothing but play around, testing his new magic, he even began to read his father's book although he never paid much attention to the spells that didn't have pictures.

By the present day he'd learnt how to send up flurries of snow into the air and then freeze the ground beneath people as they were distracted. With his staff Jack also learnt how to control the icy winds, using it to guide himself along the currents far above the clearing where his house lay.

But now, finally, he'd turned eleven and that meant the real fun was only just about to start.

2. The Sorting

****The Sorting****

As always Platform 9 3/4 was crowded. It was full of bustling students and their doting parents wishing them a goodbye and good luck. Among them Merida weaved and dodged, pushing her trolley along in front of her while her father managed to open the crowd before him and Elinor by simply being much bigger than everyone else.

Merida finally managed to get to one of the train's open doors and give her parents a goodbye. 'I'll miss yer both,' she said hugging them.

'Oh, I'm so proud,' was all her mother could say between the stray tears.

'Cheer up love, she'll be back for Christmas,' Fergus said, wrapping his arm around his wife while surreptitiously rubbing his eye with the other hand, 'and ye will send us an owl every now and then, right lass?'

'O' course but I've got to get on,' Merida laughed.

'Right yer are, don't forget to wave from the window'

Merida turned to step up to the train but discovered she was being blocked by another student struggling to lift her trunk onto the carriage.

'Need a hand?' She asked as she grabbed at the other end of the trunk and struggled to help lift it up.

'God, this ain't half heavy,' she huffed as they finally managed to get it on.

'Yeah, sorry about that,' the girl replied, 'it's just I never knew how many books there were in the world before and I'm trying to catch up'

'Ye mean this is just books!'

'Well and clothes but, yes, mainly books,' the girl answered, laughing.

'I'm Rapunzel by the way'

'Merida.'

Now that she had a minute Merida began to take notice of Rapunzel's looks. She was a pretty girl, not much older than Merida herself, with golden hair tied behind her back.

She looked back at Merida with large green eyes before smiling and asking, 'Do you want to see if there are any compartments free?' as she pointed behind her down the train with her thumb.

'Sure,' Merida replied as she lifted her own trunk up and started to follow Rapunzel down the carriage. Then she noticed Rapunzel's braid.

'Whoa, is that thing real?' she exclaimed, pointing at the massive braid of hair that fell to Rapunzel's waist and seemed almost as thick as she was.

'Oh, yeah it is. I've never cut my hair' Rapunzel said over her shoulder as they continued down the train.

'Why?'

'I've just never wanted to' Rapunzel said in a small tone that suggested it was all she planned on saying on the subject which Merida was alright with â€" after all it wasn't like_ she_ could really judge other girls on their hairstyles.

They found an empty compartment near the end of the carriage and sat down opposite each other after heaving Rapunzel's trunk onto the shelves together. Just as they were getting comfortable someone else opened the door.

He was a boy of about their age with limp brown hair and a face with more freckles than Merida. He was dressed in what looked like winter clothing, with a thick fur lined coat and thick sturdy boots. One boot actually. The two couldn't help but stare for a moment at the odd contraption that served as his left foot; it seemed to be some kind of spring based design that you wanted to look at to see how it worked.

'Uh, hi,' he said nervously, 'would it be alright if I came in here? It's just that the rest of my group's kinda taken up all the space in the other compartment.'

'Aw, wee lamb,' Merida said jokingly, 'no worries you can sit with us, no problem.'

'Thanks,' the boy replied, grinning as he stepped into the carriage

shoved his trunk with the others and sat down gingerly next to Merida.

'My name's Hiccup,'

'I'm Rapunzel,'

'Merida. Hey is that a dragon?' She asked suddenly, pointing to the green snout that had just popped out of the inside of Hiccups coat.

'Yep, this is Tiny,' Hiccup said as he pulled the little dragon out of his hiding place and placed him on his shoulder, 'He's like my version of a messenger owl'

'That's so cool, he could be friends with Pascal,' Rapunzel said excitedly.

'Who's Pascal?' Hiccup and Merida asked together.

'He's hiding between the two of you,' Rapunzel giggled pointing at a patch of the seat that suddenly turned into a small chameleon, causing both Hiccup and Merida to jump and cry out in surprise.

'Wow, this looks like the fun carriage to me,' said a voice by the door as Pascal climbed back up to his usual spot on Rapunzel's shoulder.

The three turned to see a smiling boy with dazzling white hair dressed in a blue hoodie and jeans. They also noticed he was barefoot and carrying a shepherd's crook along with his trunk.

'I think I'll sit with you guys,' the stranger continued as he flung himself down next to Rapunzel, resting his feet on his trunk like a footrest.

It was just then that the train started to move and introductions were forgotten as the four stuck their heads out of the window to wave goodbye to their families.

'I'm Jack Frost by the way,' Jack continued as he sat back down and the countryside began to flash by the window. There was a brief moment where everyone introduced themselves and whichever animals happened to be on their shoulder.

They spent the next few hours talking about their recent histories after receiving their letters, or in Jack's case bragging to the new audience about how he'd got a visit from the teachers themselves because of his unique skills until being beaten by Rapunzel who revealed that the headmaster himself had visited her.

'How come?' He'd asked, slightly miffed that his story had been outdone, 'I didn't think the headmaster had to bother with house calls'

'Well my parents _are _muggles, and the school normally sends a teacher to break the news. I guess he got sent because they were understaffed this year,' Rapunzel had covered quickly, almost without skipping a beat.

It was about then that the carriage door slid open and a small woman with a large trolley asked them if they wanted anything. Merida, Hiccup and Jack all rushed forwards buying large amounts of cauldron cakes, chocolate frogs, pumpkin pasties and Drooble's best blowing gum. Rapunzel hesitated, not knowing what to buy as she'd never experienced wizard sweets.

'Uh, can I take a look at what you've got?' She asked overwhelmed.

'Of course dear,' the woman replied, opening the trolley to allow Rapunzel to look through the contents.

After much debating and advice from the others Rapunzel finally settled with two packets of Bertie Bot's every flavour beans and the trolley lady pottered off further down the train.

The next few minutes were spent in relative silence as the four ate through some of their snacks until Rapunzel broke it with a squeal when Jack opened his first chocolate frog.

'I didn't realise they actually moved,' she said, grimacing as Jack popped the frog in his mouth.

'Ye think that's a surprise, wait until ye try those beans,' Merida laughed with cauldron cake crumbs scattered around her lips.

'I always hated those,' Hiccup added darkly, 'I always get one of the bad ones and even when I had a whole packet to myself it was nothing but bad ones'

'Really? Well then I say we have a little fun,' Jack said cheekily, 'Why don't we all have one each and see what happens?'

'I'll throw in a chocolate frog,' he added tantalisingly when hearing a moan of protest from Hiccup.

'Ugh, fine'

'Game on then,' Rapunzel said opening a packet. They each took one different coloured bean and held it waiting for the go.

'Ready?' Jack said, 'Oneâ€|twoâ€|three!'

They each ate their bean and started chewing and each face but Hiccup's lit up.

'Strawberry,' Rapunzel said happily.

'Fufge,' Merida said, muffled slightly by the fact she was still chewing.

'Caramel,' Jack declared smiling.

'Liver,' Hiccup coughed to the general laughter of the others. Jack tossed him a chocolate frog, still sniggering slightly.

'Here, you earned it.'

After that the conversation turned to Hogwarts itself and towards the houses and which they'd like to be in.

'I don't know,' Rapunzel replied thoughtfully, 'I don't really know enough about them. How about you Jack?'

'Me? I don't care,' Jack said, casually reclining in his seat, 'Hiccup?'

'Which ones do you think would want me?' Hiccup asked unsurely.

'I'll probably be in Gryffindor,' Merida announced proudly, 'It's a family tradition,' she explained.

'You wouldn't be a Weasley by any chance?' Jack asked curiously.

'No, I'm a Dunbroch. Why'd ye ask?' Merida replied.

'My dad once told me there's this family of red heads called the Weasleys who always end up in Gryffindor,' Jack explained.

'Nah, they're not mine,' Merida said certainly.

Their conversations lasted for the rest of the journey while the sun began to set and Tiny curled up to sleep on the small table with Pascal spread eagled on top of him, clearly enjoying the warmth in Tiny's belly.

As the moon started to rise the four got changed and began to prepare to get off as the train slowed at their destination.

They stumbled off the carriage, helping Rapunzel lift her heavy trunk off the step, and were immediately greeted by what appeared to be a giant rabbit. It stood on its hind legs as tall as a man and wore two leather straps around its shoulders that sheathed a few pouches and two boomerangs. These didn't seem like ordinary toy boomerangs though; these looked like they would come back to their master even if they had been thrown _through _you to do it.

'First years!' he yelled in an Australian accent, 'First years this way! Leave your trunks and owls to be collected here.'

'Well, looks like we've got to follow the kangaroo,' Jack said jokingly to the others.

'What was that?' The rabbit asked turning to the four.

'I'm a bunny,' he said, lowering his face to look directly at Jack, 'got it?'

'Yeah sure,' Jack returned casually, '_whatever_ you say'

The rabbit gave Jack a dirty look before hopping away to lead them and the first years to the edge of a giant lake while the older students headed down a different path. The first years realised as they neared the lake that boats lined the edge, each with a single lantern hanging from it.

The rabbit, who had already jumped into a boat, yelled out, 'It's four to a boat, hurry up or we'll miss the feast.'

There was a general scramble as people hurried to get a free boat. Hiccup saw Astrid and Snotlout share a boat with Fishlegs who was too large to allow a fourth passenger and the ever squabbling twins fighting over which boat to take. He followed behind Rapunzel as Merida and Jack pushed and shoved ahead of them to get an empty boat the four could share. Once everyone was in, the boats set off on their own, slowly crossing the dark waters.

'Is it me or is that a tentacle beneath us?' Rapunzel asked suddenly as she looked over the side into the waters. There was indeed and several other boats were already panicking at the sight of the monster.

'It's alright, just the giant squid out for a night time swim,' the rabbit called back reassuringly. It didn't really help.

Soon they reached the other side of the lake and the stone walls of Hogwarts rose up before them. Everyone sat there, mesmerised by the sheer size and grandeur of the school while their boats landed on the shore.

The rabbit guided them into the building and up a flight of stone steps that lead to two large double doors. The children could hear the sounds of raised voices behind them suggesting there was a large crowd awaiting the group.

'I am Professor Bunnymund,' the professor stated as he turned to the assembled students behind him.

'In a moment these doors will open and you will enter into the great hall where the welcome feast has already commenced. Before you start you must first be sorted into one of four houses: Gryffindor, Slytherin, Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff. Once you are, you will be directed to sit at your house table. Does anyone have any questions?'

A few hands rose in the crowd and Bunnymund looked over them before adding, 'Any questions not involving what species I am.'

Most hands lowered except for one, a short boy with ears that seemed to stick horizontally out of his head.

'How do we get sorted?' He asked, looking around nervously at the thought of what lay behind those doors.

Bunnymund only smiled and turned as the doors opened before him to reveal a massive stone hall. Its ceiling was so high it was nearly hidden in shadows while the hall itself was lit by thousands of floating candles that made the crowd gasp. Merida and a few other students were less surprised than, say, Rapunzel, whose mouth had dropped open in surprise, because she had been used to floating candles being used back home. But that had only been a few; here the sheer number of candles and the power of the charm that had to be keeping them up was awe inspiring in itself.

At the end of the hall stood a fifth table and seated behind it were presumably the teachers with, right in the centre, Headmaster North

dressed in dark red robes.

As Bunnymund lead the students between the tables they could feel the stares of the older years bearing down on them. Bunnymund stopped the students in front of a raised platform where a single stool stood and on it sat an old worn hat. Bunnymund hopped up to the teachers table and nodded to the transfiguration teacher Professor Toothiana as she flew to the stool.

Toothiana was eerily beautiful; she was dressed in shimmering green robes that seemed to be partly merged to her body as feathers which grew up to around her cheeks. She flew suspended in the air by the rapid beating of wings sprouting from behind her back and the first years couldn't help themselves but stare at her.

'Do ye think there are any human teachers?' Merida whispered to the others who laughed nervously, or in Jack's case just laughed.

'I am Professor Toothiana,' the strange woman said, her voice resounding clearly throughout the hall.

'As I call your name please step up and sit on the stool,' she continued, picking up the hat and waving for an enchanted set of quill and parchment to float in front of her.

She began to call out names alphabetically and, one by one, the students stepped up and were sorted by the hat, who yelled out a house as it was placed on the student's head to general cheers of whichever house it had spoken.

'Dunbroch, Merida' Tooth chimed and Merida found herself being nudged forward by a grinning Jack.

'Good luck,' Hiccup whispered as she went past while Rapunzel and Pascal gave her a thumbs-up.

Merida stepped onto the platform and sat on the stool. There was a short pause while Professor Tooth struggled to fit the hat over Merida's untamed hair but finally it was on.

'Hmm, you're a brave one I'll grant you,' a soft voice said in her head, 'and a rebel too, you're certainly a GRYFFINDOR!'

The last word was spoken out loud by the hat and the table covered in red and gold roared its approval as Merida grinned and handed the hat back to the professor before running to join them.

There was another few minutes as more people were sorted into different houses and then, 'Frost, Jack!'

Jack sauntered up to the stool calmly, barely looking around him as he sat down and felt Tooth place the hat over his head.

'Ah, a trickster,' the hat said happily, 'you don't seem to have much respect for authority but you're loyal too, at least to the people who earn it.'

'Huh, thanks I guess,' Jack replied with a grin.

'Hmm, perhaps you'll do this house some good. SLYTHERIN!' The hat

called and the table in green cheered and whooped as Jack stepped off to join them, although not before giving a slightly worried look towards the Gryffindor table and the two others yet to be decided.

Next came, 'Horrendous Haddock III, Hiccup!'

There was a wave of laughter at the name as Hiccup walked up to the hat, going red in the face. Except, that is, for the cheering behind him from Rapunzel who was quickly joined by a new student from Gryffindor and one from Slytherin.

'GO Hiccup,'

'Get on up there lad!'

'Good luck man,'

Their cheers gave Hiccup some encouragement as he sat down and the hat was placed on his head.

'Well aren't you interesting,' the hat proclaimed. 'You've made great changes in the world at such a young age and still you are modest. I know only one house that deserves youâ€|HUFFLEPUFF'

There came a delighted whooping from the yellow and black covered table as Hiccup slowly came down to join them, giving a lingering look towards the others.

Finally after many more students, 'Solaris, Rapunzel' was called.

There was a brief pause as Rapunzel remembered her new last name and hurried up to the stool with Pascal still on her shoulder. As the hat descended she gave a worried look to the other three, separated by their houses.

'You are worried Miss Rapunzel. Why?' The hat asked curiously.

'I know you probably didn't mean too, but you've separated my friends and I'm just worried if we can stay like that if we're in different houses,' she thought back guiltily.

'I sort people into the house that will bring out their greatest potential,' the hat replied dryly, 'but remember that, although you are separated in house, you may always remain united in friendship. You are smart and have taught yourself almost everything you know but there is still much for you to learn. The house you deserve most is RAVENCLAW!'

There was a tumultuous clapping from the blue and bronze table as Rapunzel stepped down and smiled, not at the table, but at her three new friends in the hopes that she could reassure them that nothing had changed. It seemed to work too as the worried looks left the other's faces and they smiled back before starting to chat with some fellow students.

When the last of the first years were sorted a hush descended as the Headmaster stepped up to the owl shaped podium.

'I'd like to give a few words before we start,' he boomed in his deep Russian accent, 'try the black pudding, it's delicious.'

At that he sat back down and food magically sprang from the tables, filling them to the brim. Everyone started reaching in and helping themselves, stacking their plates with heaps of food.

* * *

><p>The feast was over and everyone was getting up. The first years looked around, unsure of what to do when suddenly teachers appeared at the end of each table. They were the house masters with Professor Tooth as Head of Gryffindor, a small mute man in golden robes called Mansnoozie for Ravenclaw, Bunnymund for Hufflepuff and a small wrinkled old woman called Professor Whittler for Slytherin.<p>

As the groups filed after the teachers the four waved each other goodbye from between the masses of people.

Merida followed Professor Tooth up several flights of moving stairs until the Gryffindors reached the seventh floor where the portrait of a woman called the Fat Lady hung.

'Password, Professor?' The painting asked.

'In Arcadia,' Tooth recited and the portrait opened to reveal a circular entrance into the Gryffindor common room.

'The password will change every month or so,' she told the students before flying away, 'be sure to check with the house prefects to get the new one'

Merida followed the rest of the crowd into the red furnished common room, covered in tapestries of famous Gryffindor wizards or different animals. One wall was dominated by a large fireplace which was surrounded by squashy armchairs and a table. She threw herself onto a chair and rested her feet on the table as she bit into an apple she had snuck up from the hall. It had been a pretty long day.

* * *

><p>Hiccup was taken down a single flight of stairs as the Hufflepuff house was in the basement. They turned full circle into a right-hand side corridor, arriving at a stack of barrels piled on top of each other in a shadowy recess. Bunnymund tapped a rhythm on the second barrel up, middle of the second row, which opened to form a tunnel entryway into the common room.<p>

'The trick is to tap this exact barrel with the precise rhythm of the name Helga Hufflepuff,' he explained as he stepped away from the entrance to let them pass. 'The entrance is covered in protective spells so if you tap it incorrectly the spells will activate. It's always fun to watch you first years get it wrong,' he added smiling.

Hiccup passed through into the common room which was a large, earthy, round room with a low ceiling. The round windows set in the walls behind a crackling fireplace somehow showed sunlit fields filled with dandelions and rippling grass. Plants hung from every corner giving the place a flowery aroma while the room glowed with a golden

sunlight. If Hiccup could think up one word to describe the place it would be cosy.

While everyone else relaxed on the cushioned yellow and black sofas Hiccup walked through the large round door that lead to the boys' dormitory and into the First Year rooms. He found his trunk at the end of a bed and sat down; he opened it and fished around to find his sketchpad and a piece of charcoal. He then lay back against the wall and started to draw.

* * *

><p>Rapunzel and the other Ravenclaws were taken to another tower by Professor Mansnoozie up a tight spiral staircase until they reached the entrance to Ravenclaw tower. It looked like an ordinary door except for the large bronze eagle-shaped knocker which asked Mansnoozie, 'What walks on four legs in the morning, two during the day and three at night?'<p>

Mansnoozie looked at the assembled students and a question mark formed above his head, written in golden sand. The first years looked at one another questioningly, a few people tried to work it out but only Rapunzel's hand shot up into the air.

'A man, because he crawls on all fours as a baby, walks on two legs as an adult and uses a cane when they're older,' she explained warily.

There was a grinding sound as the door behind Mansnoozie opened up and a gold tick appeared above Mansnoozie's head as the professor smiled and nodded. A series of images appeared over his head that forced the students to try and work it out like a game of charades.

'He says you have to figure the riddle out yourself or wait for someone else to. That way you get to learn,' a fifth year told them as he passed by the group.

'Mansnoozie's been mute for years,' he whispered to Rapunzel as they passed through the door. 'He uses that picture charm to communicate, don't worry you learn to translate pretty quickly'

The Ravenclaw common room was wide and circular; the walls were hung with blue and bronze silks while gracefully arched windows revealed the dusk covered grounds. Rapunzel's eyes were immediately drawn up to the domed ceiling which had been painted with stars that were mirrored in the midnight blue carpet. Tables, chairs and bookcases covered every inch of the room, the place even had its own reading material. Rapunzel smiled at Pascal as they started to look at the titles; they _liked _this place.

* * *

><p>Jack was lead down to the dungeons, he wasn't entirely happy with that either. He preferred the open air to the underground and he was worried exactly how comfortable he'd be down there.<p>

Professor Whittler led them to a stretch of wall that looked no different to its neighbours.

'Nevermore,' Whittler said and the wall slide aside, revealing a stone room lit with a green glow. She then turned and explained the changing of the passwords every fortnight before trundling off down the corridor.

_Well, _Jack thought as he looked around, _this place looksâ€¦nice._

The room was certainly grand, if a little cold which wasn't really a problem for Jack anyway. It was lit by green lamps and furnished with dark green button-tufted sofas and wooden cupboards which were all decorated with a few skulls giving the place a gothic feeling. Tapestries lined the walls depicting different adventures and battles while windows looked out into a dark surface that Jack realised must be the Black lake.

'Hey, who brought the staff!' Someone yelled, carrying Jack's crook through from the first year dormitory.

'Oy! Hands off,' Jack said, snatching the crook out of the boy's hands.

'How come _you_ can use a staff?' A seventh year asked incredulously as a small crowd gathered around Jack.

'Well what can I say? It's just natural talent,' Jack said happily, brandishing the crook.

Ok, so maybe it wasn't all bad.

* * *

><p>Author's note: Hi guys. Just to say I know there's a bit of controversy over which house Hiccup and Rapunzel belong to, so for those of you who believe Hiccup should be Ravenclaw and Rapunzel Hufflepuff I understand but please bear with me as I think differently. Thanks :)

3. The First day

The First Day

As Jack walked up to the Great Hall, his staff resting on his shoulder, for breakfast the next morning he ran into Hiccup who was walking up from his own common room. Like Jack he was wearing the same school robe, grey jumper, a shirt and tie except that the underside of his robe and the stripes of his tie were now yellow and black to match his house colours while Jack's had turned green and silver.

'Hey Hiccup,' he said as he fell into stride beside the freckled Hufflepuff.

'Hi Jack, going to breakfast?'

'Yep, care to join me?'

'Uh, are we allowed to sit on other house tables?' Hiccup asked nervously.

'Oh right. That is a problem,' Jack said as realisation dawned.

'Oh hey it's Merida and Rapunzel,' he said, pointing to two figures in red and blue ahead of them before running off with Hiccup to catch the girls up.

'I know, it's not really fair that we can't sit with each other,' Rapunzel said as they explained the situation.

'What do you think Merida?' She asked the redhead who had been walking in contemplative silence.

'Hand me yer timetables,' Merida demanded suddenly, holding up her hand in which they dutifully placed their timetables. She leafed through them and smiled, 'Well I think I've solved our problem,' she said in a satisfied voice.

'We share the same classes,' she explained happily as she handed their timetables back, 'we can walk to class together and sit next to each other'

'Oh right,' Hiccup said relieved.

'Well, glad to hear that's all sorted,' Jack said happily as they entered the hall, 'I'll see you guys inâ€|Transfiguration then'

They all said a few parting words and then split off to their own tables and started to eat as the owls began to deliver the morning post and either read the newspaper or talked with fellow students.

When the time came for first lessons they all grabbed their books and met back at the Great Hall's entrance before heading off for the classroom.

'I'm so excited,' Rapunzel burst out happily, 'I've been looking forward to this _so_ much!'

'Glad to hear it,' Jack said laughing.

'No more literature or history,' Merida said wistfully, 'I hated those kinds of lessons.'

They arrived at the class and waited outside the door, chatting, while the rest of the class turned up. Eventually Professor Toothiana opened the door and, once everyone had piled in, she started to sign the register. It took longer than it should have as Tooth had a tendency to quickly list several names in succession and then had to backtrack to find students who had missed their names the first time round.

When every name had finally been ticked off Toothiana began her lesson by giving a demonstration where she turned her desk into a pig and back, making the class gasp in astonishment. She then gave small lecture on the transformation formula and after that she had the class practice a basic incantation to turn matches into needles.

Merida proved to be quite good at the class, easily transforming the

matches on her first go while Hiccup and Rapunzel took longer, waving their wands and reciting the spell repeatedly until they finally had a small pile of needles, or in some cases sharp matches. Jack was abysmal, he didn't seem to be able to concentrate enough to get the spell to work and he had to figure out a different way to focus his staff as it was too big to wave like a wand.

At the end of the lesson his matches hadn't changed and, while everyone else was filing out, Toothiana had told him, 'Not a promising first go Jack but give it time and I'm sure you'll get the hang of it'

'Well that was cool,' Merida said with a little more spring in her step as they left, 'What have we got next?'

'Charms,' Jack said in a deflated manner.

'Cheer up Jack,' Rapunzel said cheerily, 'We can't all be good at everything or where'd be the fun?'

Jack just grunted back in a non-committal manner, sticking his hands in his robe pockets.

'Aw, come on Jack, we thought you were all about fun,' Hiccup joked, putting his arm around Jack's shoulder while Merida linked arms with him and Rapunzel.

'Get off,' Jack said as he tried to shake them off, but not so hard that he actually would, and the three knew they'd got to him because he was smiling.

Charms cheered Jack up a lot. He enjoyed the guessing game like way they had to translate Mansnoozie as he started his lecture and nearly laughed himself off the seat when the professor blew gold sand out his ears in frustration at their slowness. Eventually they managed to figure out the name of the spell was Wingardium Leviosa and it was used to levitate the feathers that had been in front of each student's seat.

Rapunzel clapped delightedly as her feather floated immediately to the ceiling at her first incantation while Pascal chirped in encouragement from her shoulder and she spent the rest of the lesson happily renewing the charm whenever the feather floated back down. Jack was doing better in this class and was able to lift the feather up to eye height and tried to get it to chase Merida's which was listing slightly to the left, much to the red head's frustration.

Hiccup spent half the lesson repeating the spell with the necessary swish and flick but was unable to get the feather to do more than twitch slightly. Eventually he just started to jab at it with his wand, repeating the spell angrily. There was suddenly a loud bang and the feather exploded in Hiccup's face, leaving it covered in soot and his hair sticking backwards, making him look like a porcupine.

The class burst out laughing as strands of feather fell around Hiccup, including Jack and the others who clapped him on the back as they continued to double over. Professor Mansnoozie walked over to observe the charred table and Hiccup's blackened face, he waved his finger in a jokingly stern way and an image of a wand using the swish

and flick motion appeared over his head. _Use the right technique,_ was the clear message.

About then the bell rang and Hiccup gratefully began to pick up his slightly charred textbooks as the others gathered their feathers and placed them all in a box that Mansnoozie offered. He hurried out the class and headed back to the great hall for lunch while the others ran to catch up.

'Hey Hiccup wait up!' Jack called as they picked up the pace.

'Don't worry about how well ye did. It's only yer first lesson, anyway remember how Jack did in Transfiguration,' Merida reminded Hiccup as she squeezed his shoulder kindly.

'In my defence I didn't blow anything uâ€|OW!'

'Sorry Jack; didn't look where I was going,' Rapunzel apologised as she removed her elbow from his ribs.

'Don't worry guys; it's not about the class. Okay it's mainly not about the class,' he defended as they gave him withering looks.

'Seriously! I'm just anxious to see Toothless between lunch and lessons'

'Toothless, who's Toothless?' Jack asked curiously.

'My friend, he's a dragon.'

'Another dragon?' Merida asked in surprise, 'What about Tiny?'

'Well, he's like my messenger owl. Toothless is my partner, he's staying with my friend Gobber, the Care for Magical Creatures professor'

'Can we come too,' Rapunzel asked hopefully, 'It sounds pretty cool to go and see more dragons'

'What _are_ you any way, the dragon whisperer?' Jack asked cheerily as he brushed his staff along the floor, freezing it so a couple of Ravenclaws slipped over behind them.

'Yeah, something like that,' Hiccup replied mysteriously with a smirk as they arrived at the entrance of the great hall.

'Fine, meet me here after lunch if you want to come meet him'

They all agreed and went off to get lunch, although the fact that they'd arrived together hadn't gone unnoticed by certain people at their tables who glowered at them suspiciously. They had also been noticed by the headmaster, as they had that morning, sitting at his usual spot and whispered quietly to Tooth and Mansnoozie, 'It's already starting, and zhe year has only just begun. We shall have to keep a closer eye on them than we thought'

* * *

><p>After lunch Hiccup guided the others out onto the school grounds and towards Gobber's hut.<p>

'Why does this guy live out on the grounds instead of in the school like everyone else?' Jack asked with a look of disgust on his face as his bare feet sank into the slightly damp mud.

'I think it's traditional for the Care for Magical Creatures teacher to live out here,' Hiccup suggested, 'It's so they can take care of the animals between lessons'

'Well whatever, as long as we get there soon,' Jack replied miserably as his steps continued to squelch.

'Don't worry Jack, I think we're here,' Rapunzel said as they turned a corner and Gobber's hut appeared before them. While the lights in the actual hut weren't lit the small forge that had been added next to it was glowing with the flames within while smoke curled up from its chimney.

'Hey Gobber, Toothless, I've come to visit you both!' Hiccup called as they neared and the clanking noise inside the forge grew louder.

'Hiccup? Is that you ye little troll hunter,' a large man with a funny stone tooth cried happily as he stepped out of the forge, his changeable hand currently fitted with a blacksmiths hammer.

'Oh, and you've brought friends. What a surprise'

'Sorry I sort of invited them without asking,' Hiccup said apologetically.

'No it's just a surprise ye've managed to make friends so fast,' Gobber joked, pulling Hiccup into a backbreaking hug.

'So where's Toothless?' Hiccup asked. 'I promised the guys I'd introduce them to him'

There was a draconic roar from behind them as Toothless barrelled out from the trees in a swift black blur and pounced on Hiccup who started to laugh as the dragon nuzzled his face.

'So this is Toothless,' Rapunzel said politely while Pascal cowered in the weave of her hair.

'Doesn't look toothless ta me,' Merida said dazedly, Toothless had jumped pretty closely to her on his way to Hiccup and she'd got a pretty good look at a large set of fangs.

'I called him that because he can retract his fangs,' Hiccup laughed as he stood up and Toothless sat next to his side, looking inquisitively at the others.

'So guys thisâ€¦is Toothless, Toothless these are my new friends Rapunzel, Merida and Jack,' Hiccup continued as Toothless began to approach the three, his head cocked slightly to the side in curiosity.

'Don't be scared, he won't hurt you,' Hiccup reassured them as they

stepped away from the dragon unsurely, 'Just hold your hand out and he'll come to it'

Merida looked at the others and, seeing that they weren't willing to go first, stepped up and held her hand out. As Toothless neared she stopped breathing, anticipating that any second the giant lizard would attack, but then his head met her hand and suddenly she was staring into green eyes bigger than Rapunzel's that looked back innocently.

'Oh wow,' she breathed as she felt the warmth of the dragon seep into her fingers. She reached out her other hand and brushed it lightly across the smooth black scales along Toothless head and heard Toothless give a content purring noise.

'Aw, he's just a big softie really,' Rapunzel cooed as she and Jack approached and began to stroke the dragon along his scaly neck. Pascal suddenly sprang down from his hiding place and along Rapunzel's arm so he could stare intensely into the dragon's eyes, clearly weighing the dragon up. All Toothless did in return was give the chameleon a small lick in a friendly kind of way which seemed to work as Pascal spent the rest of lunch sitting happily between the dragon's ears.

The four settled down to play with Toothless while Gobber brought out some butter beer from his hut. He then began to regale them with stories from his own time in Hogwarts until Merida interrupted by asking:

'How come Toothless has a fake tail fin?'

'That would be because of me,' Hiccup answered guiltily.

'You hurt your dragon!' Rapunzel exclaimed in horror.

'It was a different time,' Hiccup said upset, 'and if I hadn't, we'd have never met and then where would I be? Still just a loser in Berk? A failure to my dad?'

'If it weren't for you two Berk would still be nothing but a pack o' dragon slayers still getting' themselves killed for nothing,' Gobber reassured him as he ruffled Hiccup's hair.

'Wait a minute,' Jack said confused, 'I thought Hiccup got Toothless after he was trained by a tamer?'

'Course not,' Gobber laughed, 'Hiccup was the first dragon tamer. He taught us everything we know'

'The first,' Jack said blankly, his brain unable to process the idea that little, nervous Hiccup had managed to tame a wild nightfury.

'You haven't told 'em?' Gobber asked incredulously.

'I'd be bragging to everybody I met. Wellâ€¦tell 'em then'

'Fine,' Hiccup huffed. For the rest of lunch, he told his four friends the story of him and Toothless, stopping every now and then when one of them asked a question. When he was done they sat staring

at him as he rested his back against Toothless' warm body and the dragon's tail curled over his legs.

'Cool!' The three suddenly said in unison, they thought it was incredible and wouldn't stop asking questions until the bell rang.

The time eventually came that they had to get up and leave for Potions. They all said a quick goodbye to Gobber and everyone gathered around Toothless to give him a final pet before heading off.

'Bye bud!' Hiccup called behind them as they walked back up the path to school.

'You really love him don't you?' Rapunzel asked with Pascal sitting back on her head.

'Yeah, he's pretty much my best friend,' Hiccup replied smiling.

'Oh Hiccup, I'm hurt,' Jack said in mock pain, 'I thought _I_ was your best friend'

They all rounded the corner, giggling as Jack pretended to turn his crook on himself in joke sorrow. They then turned into the courtyard outside the school entrance which was currently full of other students walking around in groups.

'Hi Jack,' one Slytherin girl called out, waving at Jack until she saw who he was walking with and then stopped to whisper frantically to her friends who were all giving the group strange looks.

The four noticed that a lot of first years were looking at them strangely as well as a few older students from every house.

'That was weird,' Merida said as they stepped back into the school and followed Jack to the stairs to the dungeons.

'Well we're not exactly the most inconspicuous group,' Hiccup stated, 'I've got my metal foot, you and Rapunzel have the hair and Jack's got his flashy staff'

'My staff isn't flashy, it's cool,' Jack defended heatedly.

'_Whatever_ you say,'

They arrived at the gloomy entrance to the Potions class behind everyone else and so were the last to get in which forced them to sit at the only two empty tables at the front. Jack sat with Rapunzel behind one cauldron and Merida and Hiccup behind the other. They were the only tables with more than one house colour, although they didn't notice it.

The current Professor had seemingly tried to liven up the otherwise depressing dungeons that served as the potions room by decorating it in hundreds of different woodcuts, all containing the form of a bear. The professor's desk was also littered with carvings as well as plain blocks of wood and what looked like several types of carving tools. A stuffed raven perched on one corner and appeared to stare out over

the classroom with its black eyes.

Professor Whittler herself stood at the head of the classroom, signing people off as they entered. When everyone had taken their seats she placed the register quietly on her desk and stepped forward, opening her mouth solemnly.

'Oh, here we go. Here comes the speech,' the raven suddenly complained making everybody jump in their seats.

Professor Whittler scowled and, in one swift movement, brought her wand out and flicked it. A broom that had, until then, been propped quietly in a corner sprang to life and swatted the bird clean off the table before busily starting to brush around the room.

'That's enough out o' you ye overgrown pigeon,' the professor cackled before turning back to the class speaking in a sombre and serious voice:

'Welcome to Potions, for many of ye this may well prove to be the most trying and complex of classes as ye learn to mix yer own batch of deadly poisons, wondrous cures and even how ta brew enchantments themselves. The more talented of ye may even get it right and not blow yerselves up. Now hurry up dearies, turn to page 3 in yer books and start brewing that cure for boils. Be sure ta leave the results in yer cauldrons at the end o' the lesson,' she finished cheerily waving her hands in a hurrying fashion.

'Shouldn't you teach us how first?' A Ravenclaw asked worriedly from the back.

'Where's the fun in that dear?' the professor continued as she returned to her desk and began to hack away at a lump of wood, 'Ye might as well learn to run before ye can walk. Or burn yer eyebrows off, either way'

There was a general scramble as each group fetched the necessary ingredients for the potion and any particular cutting, crushing or mixing tools. Jack was impressed at how fast Rapunzel moved, quickly chopping ingredients and tossing them into the cauldron one after the other, occasionally looking back at the book for further instructions before returning again to the cauldron.

'If you need any help just ask,' he said as he leaned back in his chair.

'Sure, crush these roots into a powder for me,' Rapunzel replied, not looking away from her work which meant she didn't see him stick his tongue out. Pascal did, however, who pointed to the roots with his tail and made a crushing motion with his hand and a no-nonsense look on his face.

'Uh, Merida I don't think you should be adding that yet,' Hiccup's nervous voice floated over as Jack got to work.

'No worries, it can't matter too much _when_ ye put them in. I mean the potion doesn't care when they get put in just so long as they are,' Merida's voice replied, all confidence.

Another few minutes ticked by, Jack presented Rapunzel proudly with

his powdered root and was given another job while Rapunzel surreptitiously mashed in the lumps he'd left.

Suddenly there was a FROOM! and a dazzling purple light filled the room.

After Jack and Rapunzel blinked away the last dancing spots of light in their eyes they saw Merida and Hiccup standing beside a smoking cauldron. Both of their faces were blackened with soot and the hair had been blown back until it was at right angles to their bodies, Merida's particularly managed to stretch a fair distance behind her before drooping at the ends.

'Next time follow the recipe,' Whittler lectured from her desk, having not looked up since the explosion.

Then the laughter started.

It took a long time to die down and Merida and Hiccup could do nothing but stand rigidly in front of their cauldron still petrified from the explosion. Only Rapunzel and Jack, after he poured in the final ingredient into their cauldron, rushed forward to see if they were alright. Rapunzel took Merida's face in her hand to look it over for burns while Pascal chirped worriedly on her shoulder. Jack, meanwhile, tapped Hiccup on the head twice and laughed gleefully as Hiccup swayed slightly.

'Are you guys alright?' Rapunzel asked worriedly as she pushed Jack out the way to see Hiccup.

'Buh, '

'Muh, '

'Scared by the bang were you?' Jack asked loudly into their ears. This seemed to wake them up as the two turned angrily to Jack, the visible skin under the soot turning red, and said:

'Shut up Jack!'

'It was her fault anyway,' Hiccup continued, angrily motioning at Merida.

'My fault,' Merida retorted, 'How is it my fault?'

'You were the one who kept chucking stuff in when you weren't supposed to!'

'You had the book; it was yer job to tell me what ta do.'

'As if you'd listen you psychotic Scot, '

The two suddenly stopped arguing as they realised Jack and Rapunzel were laughing at them again.

'What's so funny?' Merida asked in a deflated voice as she calmed down.

'Your freckles,' Jack managed between laughs as he and Rapunzel resorted to leaning on each other for support, 'they'reâ€|they're

turning blue.'

The two fell back into hysterical giggles as Merida and Hiccup looked back at each other and began to wipe their faces clean with gasps of horror. It was true, their freckles were blue but not just the colour blue; their freckles were glowing.

'Oh gods,' Hiccup moaned as he gingerly touched his face.

'Please tell me this isn't permanent!'

'And you thought we stood out before,' Jack said happily as he and Rapunzel put their arms around the two.

The group looked behind them and saw the rest of the class staring daggers at them as their cauldrons bubbled unchecked.

'Don't worry about us,' Jack said reassuringly, 'We were just checking up on our friends.'

A dozen unsmiling faces stared back and a few couples began to mutter to each other under their breath. Fortunately the bell rang and students began to pack up their books and potions equipment although not before giving the four another dirty look as they left.

Eventually the four were left on their own with their arms still wrapped around each other.

'What was that about?' Merida asked, confused.

'I have no idea,' Jack replied in equal confusion.

'Well, let's hurry up anyway, dinner's about to start,' he added, brightening up.

The four rushed around to gather their things, thanked Professor Whittler and wandered out into the empty dungeon, smiles returning to their faces as they chatted and joked, looking for all the world like a perfect picture of friendship.

* * *

><p>Many miles away on an isolated rock in the middle of a raging sea Daniel Fayefield shivered and gathered his auror's robes around him. This was not a cushy job and the hours were way too long but at least the pay was worth it.<p>

'Hey Daniel,' Alexander Woodcross greeted as he walked down the dark corridor. 'I hear your daughter's got into Hogwarts'

'Yeah, I got a letter this morning,' Daniel replied proudly. 'She's a Slytherin like her old man. It sounds like she's already got a crush too,' he added darkly, 'some 'amazing' guy called Jack Frost. Apparently he can use a staff at eleven but I don't believe a word of it, he's just showing off to impress the house'

'Did you say Frost?' A dark, intelligent, voice asked behind them.

'Shut up Black. We're not playing your games'

Pitch Black stood up in his cell, a thoughtful look in his eye.

'Frost,' he said to himself, 'the little Frost boy in Hogwarts already?'

'I told you to shut it!' Daniel yelled. He'd always thought Black was creepy.

'I really must thank you Fayefield and you Woodcross. If it had not been for your incompetence my education here would have been greatly hampered,' Black said half to himself, still walking towards them.

'What are you on about?' Alexander asked irritably, he suddenly felt a little scared, which was ridiculousâ€|were the shadows moving?

'Azkaban,' Pitch replied, stroking his finger along the walls of his cell, 'this place had been the primary habitat for the dementors for years. The very stones are ingrained with their powers and I decided to spend a few years studying what they left behind. It's been very informative, I can tell you. Now, though, I think I've learned all I could, so I'll be leaving'

'You must be kidding,' Daniel scorned, trying to hide the whimper in his voice, 'Your wand is locked up safe and sound in the dungeons and you'll never get your hands back on it'

Pitch leaned forward, his face nearly pressing against the bars, and smiled horribly as if he was enjoying a joke at their expense.

'I will now'

There was an eruption of black sand and mist pouring out of the cracks in the stones to form the bodies of great black horses that charged at the guards, their nostrils flaring. The two wizards pulled out their wands, their mouths opening to form a spell, which turned into screams of fear as their heads filled with terrifying images that overrode every other sense and emotion.

When it was over another horse arrived, reared up on its hind legs and smashed the bars of Pitch's prison. It trotted forward to Pitch's outraised hand and reverently placed a thin black wand into it.

'Meet my Nightmares,' he said to the bodies lying before him, 'so much more of an improvement to the dementors'

He waved his wand experimentally and smiled at the familiarity of the feeling. He began to laugh at the sheer thrill of freedom before he waved his wand in a command to the Nightmares.

'Find him,' he ordered and the Nightmares reared and ran in obedience to his words..

His laughter filled the cells of Azkaban again as the Nightmares galloped away, their manes and tails streaming behind them like a

group of dark comets.

* * *

><p>Author's note: So Pitch has made his first appearance, what do you guys think? Just so you know I am currently uploading at a pace I can't keep up with. From now on it will only be about one or two chapters per week. Hope you guys are still enjoying this and thanks for sticking with the story :)

4. The Confrontation

****Confrontation****

Two months later

'Come on Merida, it's not that hard,' Rapunzel said as Merida slumped back in her seat, angrily pushing her potions homework away. It was a Sunday and they were sitting opposite one another in an empty classroom with the potions textbook and the last pages of Merida's homework between them.

'Ye can say that, ye've been getting nothin' but top marks since we started,' Merida complained. 'Why don't Jack and Hiccup have to go through this?'

'Jack and Hiccup are getting good marks in Potions so Hiccup's taken Jack flying on Toothless,' Rapunzel replied pushing Merida's work back to her, 'Now come on you know this one'

'Aw, he never takes me flying,' Merida whined as she picked up her quill and started to write.

'He took us flying yesterday,' Rapunzel reminded her as Pascal made an exasperated sound, 'Anyway he thought Jack needed cheering up,' she continued sadly.

'Slytherins finally do it?' Merida asked sullenly.

'Yep, that's all of us,' Rapunzel sighed, 'I'm impressed he lasted as long as he did, even the Hufflepuffs told Hiccup to stop hanging out with us a week ago'

It had all started two months before. The glares they'd been getting from fellow house members, mostly the younger years but also a few higher ones, didn't stop after that and kept getting worse. People began to ignore them at meals and stopped talking to them in the common rooms, groups also started to mutter behind them as the four walked past.

Finally Merida had had enough and confronted her house one night in the common room after a classmate called Susan Nix whispered to her friend and the two started giggling while Merida walked past.

'What's yer problem?' Merida demanded, turning angrily.

'Hey you're the one with the problem,' Susan laughed mockingly, 'why else would you keep hanging around those losers? Unless you've

got a problem with your own house'

'My friends aren't losers,' Merida retorted, growing red in the face as the rest of the house turned to watch the show, 'and I like Gryffindor, it's _my_ house'

'What's going on?' A fifth year called Jordan asked, stepping in between the two, 'Merida can spend time with whoever she wants, it doesn't matter what house they are,' he defended calmly.

'Really, what if they're a Slytherin?' Susan replied smugly with her arms crossed.

At that, more of the upper years looked around with curiosity or worry in their eyes and Merida could hear a few quiet gasps of shock.

'Whoa, a Slytherin? You don't want to hang around with them,' Jordan said, turning to Merida with a similar look of worry, 'That lot are bad news Merida'

'Ta hell with that,' Merida retorted angrily " _Great, now the higher years were turning on her as well_. 'Jack's a nice guy, I don't care what house he's in'

'Are you blind?' Susan spat back from behind Jordan, 'He'll just turn into another dark wizard like all the rest'

Merida drew her wand and pointed it at Susan, pushing Jordan aside in one quick movement, ready to fire whichever curse first popped into her head while Susan struggled to free her wand from a robe pocket.

'You take that back!'

'Expelliarmus!' A voice cried, there was a flash of red light and Merida and Susan's wands sailed out of their hands and into the grip of the house prefect, Amanita Dragonblood.

'I don't want any more of this,' Amanita continued angrily as she stalked towards them.

'Gryffindors should not turn their wands on each other no matter what Merida. If you want to prove you're loyal to this house you will _never_ do it again.'

'As for you Susan, just because Jack is Slytherin doesn't mean he'll become a dark wizard,' she continued, turning to the sneering Susan.

'Ha!' Merida cheered at Susan triumphantly; glad to finally have someone on her side.

'But that doesn't mean you should spend time with him Merida,' Amanita chastised as she handed Merida her wand, 'Slytherin is our biggest rival and I wouldn't put it past them to use a spy against us.'

'Jack is not a spy!' Merida yelled furiously, physically restraining herself from raising her wand again.

'So keep an eye on him and don't fight with us, okay,' Amanita continued, ignoring Merida's outburst while Susan made faces behind her back.

After that Merida had got nothing but scathing looks from the rest of the house, Amanita had provided her some breathing space in the common room but not for long. The rivalry between Gryffindor and Slytherin had always been pretty deep and two being friends was unthinkable, the house wasn't planning on taking it lightly. In hindsight she also knew it had been a bad move to draw her wand on a fellow house member, hexing Susan Nix was hardly going to make Gryffindor warm to her.

Not everyone looked down on her though, she could see a few of the higher years didn't care one way or the other and Hiccup's old friends Astrid and Snotlout hadn't joined in on the jeering but they hadn't taken her side either. They'd maintained a neutral kind of friendship with Hiccup, they'd say hi and talk happily with him until someone else saw them. Hiccup didn't blame them; they just wanted to fit in with their house.

It had been different for Rapunzel; she was just too likable to be bullied. She was such a pleasant person to be around, always asking how people were or giving them homework tips and always with a cheery smile on her face, that no one could ever bring themselves to make fun of her for being friends with the others. A group of first and second years eventually decided to tell her that; maybe, spending most of her time with none Ravenclaws would hurt her reputation or her academic scores, at least that's what some people were thinking, not them of course. She'd just looked at them oddly as if she didn't realise she'd had a reputation and they'd walked off.

She'd known what they were thinking of course and it had hurt her to see a sort of gap forming between her and the Ravenclaws. Not anything physical, they still talked to her and some even waved and said hello as they passed her in the corridor, but she could still feel it, a space that divided her from them and prevented her from getting too close.

She also had to deal with the taunting from the other houses as they passed the group in the courtyard, so it wasn't as if she had it any easier.

The four had stuck together though; even when they were being insulted and shunned they remained friends. Merida had no idea why they fought so strongly to stay together but they did and she couldn't help but feel proud of their little group.

She looked wistfully out the window to the cloudy sky outside.

'I wonder how the others are doin',' she asked thoughtfully.

'They're probably down by now, it's nearly dinner time,' Rapunzel replied, 'Now let's finish this Potions off'

'Ugh, yes mum.'

* * *

><p>Jack and Hiccup trudged back up the grounds together. Jack was dressed in his casual blue hoodie and jeans while Hiccup wore his riding gear and helmet. Jack also looked a lot happier than he had in weeks, the excitement of the flight helping to wash away the memories of the last few months.<p>

'So you take him out to fly every day?' He asked as they rounded the hill and came into view of Hogwarts.

'Every morning,' Hiccup replied, 'Toothless likes to stretch his wings at least once a day so I generally head out before breakfast'

'That's a hell of a way to start the morning,' Jack said impressed.

He was no stranger to flying after all, he was improving more and more with controlling the winds, but it wasn't the same as flying on Toothless. For a start even though the winds could move him pretty fast Toothless was in a whole other league. Toothless flew through the air like an arrow with Hiccup lying flat against the saddle, twitching his metal leg to move the artificial fin in perfect unison with his dragon. It was exhilarating just to watch them and even more so to ride with them.

'So, how's Hufflepuff,' he asked cautiously.

'Oh, most of them are alright. They say they're just worried about me getting bullied but there are a few who think I'm some sort of traitor.'

'A traitor? That's a bit harsh isn't it?'

'Well, it's complicated,' Hiccup tried to explain, 'we Hufflepuffs sort of get looked down on by the other houses, Ravenclaw and Slytherin especially. It's because we don't have any specific requirements for the sorting so we're seen as the loser house were all the dregs end up. The other's think that because I'm hanging out with other houses I'm ashamed to be a Hufflepuff.'

'If it's any consolation the Slytherins didn't really care you were,' Jack said awkwardly as they walked into the courtyard. 'Honestly I think they were giving me some slack afterâ€|you know, Pitch Black'

It had been pretty big news at breakfast a couple of days after their first lessons. Jack had come out of the boy's dormitories to see a group of people huddled around a first year girl called Alice Fayefield, he realised she was the girl who had waved to him after he and the others had first visited Toothless. She was crying heavily with great racking sobs shaking her body.

'What's happened?' He asked a boy called Mulcaster who was standing awkwardly to one side.

Mulcaster looked at him angrily, as if to say it wasn't any of Jack's business, before handing him a folded up newspaper. Jack opened it to the front page and read the headline:

****Break out in Azkaban, several dark wizards escape.****

'Her dad was one of the guards, she got a letter this morning,' Mulcaster added simply.

'Oh God, that'sâ€¦,' Jack said sympathetically, stopping as a name flashed up in the article.

'Pitch Black,' he muttered, turning to the second page to see a moving picture of the dark wizard that had killed his father.

'Yeah he led the breakout, no one knows how though,' Mulcaster said irritably, his breath frosting in front of him.

'Pitch Black,' Jack repeated through gritted teeth, ice spreading over the pages from his fingertips and covering over Black's face, consuming it, 'He got out!'

'What's your problem?' Alice asked wiping her nose as angry heads turned to him from the concerned group.

'He!â€¦he killed my dad too,' Jack said, the flash of ice cold anger that had passed through him faded under the look in Alice's eyes. The same one he'd seen in the mirror after his dad's funeral.

'I'm sorry,' she said half-grudgingly.

'Yeah me too,' he returned sadly, 'I'm going to breakfast. I'llâ€¦I'll see you later okay.'

He'd left them at that and by the time he reached the others he was his usual cheerful self, bouncing around and making fun of Merida as if nothing was wrong. He only told them about it later when he had a chance to calm down and sort it through in his head.

They didn't say much, except for Merida who'd said, 'That bastard,' after hearing what Pitch had done. Rapunzel and Merida had sat down next to him and pulled him into a short hug while Hiccup had stood around awkwardly, not sure what to do, but he made up for it later when he took Jack out flying on Toothless for the first time. It was Hiccup's normal way of trying to cheer someone up, he loved flying with Toothless so much he honestly believed that riding with the dragon would lift anyone's spirits, and he was right.

'So what changed?' Hiccup asked curiously, bringing Jack out of his thoughts.

'You remember a couple of days ago when Rapunzel told us she was muggle born, well one of the Slytherins must have overheard because the next day a few people told me to stop spending time with her.'

'Maybe they didn't mean it the way you think,' Hiccup tried to encourage him.

'They called her a mud-blood,' Jack said flatly and that left no room for excuse or exception.

'Those Slytherins are more out of date than us Berkians and we haven't changed since the Viking era,' Hiccup spat angrily to the

agreement of Jack.

They spent the rest of the short walk happily insulting all the idiots in their houses until they nearly ran into a group of Slytherins lead by Mulcaster heading into the Great Hall and Jack pulled Hiccup into another corridor before they were seen.

'What's going on?' Hiccup said alarmed.

'Shh, those are some of the Slytherins,' Jack whispered back.

'I didn't think you were the kind of person to hide from bullies.'

'I'm not, what do you say we have a little fun.'

'We're supposed to be meeting up with the girls before dinner.'

'Then let's go get them first, they won't want to miss out on this,' Jack said, an evil grin gracing his face. 'You in?'

'Alright, what have you got in mind?' Hiccup asked, smiling back.

* * *

><p>Half an hour later the Slytherins left through the Hall's double doors and headed outside into the courtyard, arguing amiably over whose quidditch team was the best. That was why they didn't notice the thin line of golden thread stretched out at the bottom step.<p>

As one boys and girls tripped over the thread or each other and landed on the ice covered stone cobbles. Before they knew what was happening, but not before two of them saw the golden thread disappear around a corner, they began to slide along the ice that appeared to be forming a pathway in front of them.

When they'd past out of sight Merida and Rapunzel snuck out from behind the steps, Rapunzel carrying a bundle of her shining hair. Giggling the pair joined the people already hurrying off to see what would happen.

'Could you help me braid my hair when we get there?' Rapunzel asked as they ran down a hill.

The Slytherins had started screaming in panic as they accelerated downhill, some of them spinning or rolling and none of them able to get up. They passed large groups of other students during their descent and were soon being followed by running and cheering children who were eager to watch the show. The Black Lake suddenly stretched out before them and, with a final gut wrenching drop down the last hill; they were thrown into the shallow water at the bank.

They emerged, dripping and spluttering, their robes half covered in mud and slime, and were greeted by a crowd doubling over in laughter. Among them Merida and Rapunzel had to lean on each other just to stay upright, Rapunzel's hair pooling on the ground between them, forgotten.

'You gotta be careful this time of year. It's getting icy,' Jack drawled cheerfully, crouching on the top of his crook while a smiling Hiccup leaned on it with his arms crossed.

The Slytherins glared at him, already putting two and two together, as they stumbled back up the hills, squelching with each step.

* * *

><p>Later that night the four sat on the Grand Staircase as they waited out the curfew that would force them to return to their common rooms. They were celebrating with a round of Bertie Bott fishing which had become a traditional game for them whenever they had something to celebrate, although Hiccup had to be bribed with chocolate frogs whenever they played because he had so far lost every game.

'Cherry'

'Walnut'

'Garlic'

'Vomit'

Merida and Jack laughed at the other two; Rapunzel was washing her mouth out with water while Hiccup, who'd got the vomit flavoured bean, was gagging silently.

'I hate this game,' Hiccup moaned unhappily.

'Shut up, we give you a chocolate frog for each bean you eat,' Rapunzel replied happily. Strangely, Bertie Bott's every flavour beans had become her favourite sweet and she was usually the one who started the game, seemingly enjoying the gamble that eating each bean was.

'Well, I think we all deserve a congratulations,' Jack said happily, high on victory as the staircase began to move from floor to floor.

'Here, here,' Merida cheered happily, 'that'll show those Slytherins ta tell ye not ta spend time with us.'

'You don't want to do that to the rest of our houses do you?' Hiccup asked nervously.

'Nah, they deserved it more,' Jack replied looking at his watch. 'Sorry guys, looks like our time's up,'

'Ugh, why can't curfew be longer?' Rapunzel asked as she stood up.

'I guess we do need some time apart,' Hiccup said sensibly as headed down the steps.

'Wouldn't want ta get bored of each other too soon,' Merida joked as she headed up the flight of stairs they had been sitting on.

'Like you could ever get bored of me,' Jack called after her as he

jumped from the steps and floated on icy winds to the bottom floor, making them all smile.

* * *

><p>The next day after breakfast the four headed out onto the training grounds where Madame Hooch stood with two lines of brooms waiting for them.<p>

'I'll see you guys up there,' Hiccup said, turning down the road to Gobber's hut.

The first flying lesson had been greatly anticipated by the students, especially Merida and Jack who were both quidditch fans. They'd half-ran, half-dragged the other two towards the grounds for the first lesson and ended up arriving fifteen minutes early.

Hiccup had only gone to one lesson to prove he could fly up and down on the broom, as per the agreement his father had made with Headmaster North, and then he had been allowed to ride Toothless during the lessons. As the others had grown more adept at flying Madame Hooch had allowed the class to fly around more freely as she hovered higher in the air to keep an eye on them. Since then the four had spent every lesson flying around the grounds and over the lake.

'Bet you a galleon I can get above the astronomy tower first Dunbroch!' Jack yelled running to a broom.

'Ye're on Frost,' Merida responded, a broom already in hand.

Rapunzel laughed at the two excitedly rising into the air as she walked to a broom, held out her hand and commanded, 'Up.'

'Ready Pascal?' She asked to the quivering chameleon wrapped in her blue and bronze scarf. Pascal had never liked flying.

She lifted them off the ground and tilted the head of the broom up to rise faster and meet Merida and Jack who were descending from their race, Merida angrily handing a galleon over to a smug Jack.

'Are you two done?' She asked as she levelled out with them.

'Yep,' Jack said pleasantly while Merida grunted behind him.

They flew down towards the edge of the dark forest near Gobber's hut and, although they had been warned not to fly over it by Hooch, Jack and Merida persisted in a daredevil game of flying as close as they could to the trees without passing over them. They were joined by Hiccup and Toothless who rose up in a black flash to bank and glide serenely next to them, the dragon hardly beating his wings.

'Hi Toothless,' Rapunzel cried across to the dragon who purred in greeting and gave a gummy smile.

The four swooped down in an arc that took them over the black lake, their scarfs flying back in the winds, except for Jack who didn't wear a scarf even in the coldest weather.

Jack and Merida began to race each other across the grounds and lake that surrounded the school while Rapunzel sat, happily gliding at her own pace as she watched. Jack and Merida were urging their brooms faster and faster, seeing who could beat the other in terms of pure speed. Suddenly Hiccup and Toothless zoomed between them in a lightning fast blur, forcing them to veer off and slow down.

'Show off!' Merida yelled after them as they sped ahead although she was smiling.

Hiccup loved to fly Toothless; it was easily the thing he looked forward to most during the day. He clicked his metal leg in a sequence that came naturally to him now, in turn Toothless angled his wings to correspond with his tail fins and they sped faster over the Black Lake. This was what Hiccup loved the most, feeling his and Toothless' movements blend seamlessly together to move through the air. And what speed, the nightfury was the fastest breed of dragon alive and Gods knew it never got boring.

They spent the rest of the lesson flying and chasing each other across the grounds while Madame Hooch screamed at them to slow down and stop messing about. At the end of the lesson they all landed back on the training pitch while Hiccup flew back to Gobber's hut, their faces blushing from the cold and wind. Jack's hair had messed up in the wind and was sticking out in all directions while Rapunzel's and Merida's remained the same, Rapunzel's braid being too thick to change and Merida's hair was already in a state of pre-messed.

'Thanks Professor,' they said in unison as they stacked their brooms in her arms and hurried back to the front entrance.

'Do you lot never slow down!?' The professor's voice bellowed after them.

As usual they all ran off to their common rooms to gather their charms textbooks for the next lesson. Rapunzel ran up the staircase that would take her to Ravenclaw tower until a grinding sound told her the stairs had chosen that moment to move over towards the astronomy tower.

'Great Pascal, looks like we're going to have to make a detour,' she said glumly to the chameleon who chirped in exasperation.

They walked up the rest of the stairs and into the corridor that led away from it, this had happened before so Rapunzel knew she could take a turning on the right that would take her to the spiral staircase to Ravenclaw tower.

'Locomotor mortis!'

Rapunzel's legs snapped together as the leg-locker curse took effect and fell forward, Pascal chirping in surprise and horror as he tumbled from her shoulder and scampered away into the shadows.

She twisted around to see the group of Slytherins the four had pranked the other day, as well as a larger group behind them that she didn't know, advancing down the corridor. The lead member, a second year boy called Mulcaster, had his wand drawn and was presumably the one who'd cursed her.

'Hey mud-blood,' Mulcaster said as they surrounded her.

'What do you want?' Rapunzel asked, trying to keep herself sitting upright.

'Want? Oh nothing much. We're just curious whether you knew about what happened to us yesterday because we know it was your hair that tripped us up,' Mulcaster replied nonchalantly, although anger edged his last words.

'At first we thought you'd tripped us intentionally but then we realised you probably hadn't noticed it had fallen out of its braid. So we want to help you out, we know you don't like to cut your hair but even you must be struggling with it now, otherwise that unfortunate situation would never have happened.'

'So what we're going to do,' another Slytherin said behind him, taking something from her robe pocket, 'is give you a quick haircut.'

At those words the Slytherins each took out a pair of scissors from their robes and advanced towards her. Rapunzel shuffled backwards and started to fumble in her robes in panic. Then she felt a Slytherin behind her pull at her braid, causing it to break and allow the golden strands to fall around behind her.

'NO! GET AWAY FROM MY HAIR!' Rapunzel roared angrily, pulling her wand out from her robes in a single furious movement.

The Slytherins had chosen to attack Rapunzel because they'd always assumed she was the weak one of the group. They decided not to get back at Hiccup because, although they also thought of him as a weaker member, they'd seen him riding his pet nightfury around the grounds and worried he'd set it on them. Merida and Jack were out of the question, the Slytherins had seen them duel each other in Defence Against the Dark Arts, a subject they both excelled in. Jack had his weird ice magic to add to the spells they were taught and Merida moved and fought with well-trained muscles and an incredible ferocity that made people next to her flinch.

Rapunzel on the other hand had always proved pretty bad at performing jinxes and curses, they were the only spells she couldn't get the hang of, much to the despair of Professor Maximus as he watched over her and Hiccup duelling.

They'd always seen her as a cheerful, smiling girl who'd been very gentle and kind and had never really shown any negative emotion to people.

The Rapunzel in front of them now, however, did not look like that. Her eyes burned with anger and a terrifying scowl lit her face, even though her legs were still useless the Slytherins instinctively backed away from this new look.

'Wingardium Leviosa!' She cried, causing the two Slytherins behind her to rise swiftly to the ceiling before they had a chance to react.

'Lumos solem,' she continued, pointing her wand at Mulcaster who had

raised his wand to cast a spell. The flash of light caught him of guard and he stumbled back, his hands clawing at his blinded eyes.

'Verdimillious tria!'

A third spell sent green sparks dancing across the room that should have merely stunned their five targets but instead also flung them down the corridor.

She began to desperately prepare spells and roll out the way simultaneously as the Slytherins she hadn't hit raised their wands for a counter strike.

'Rapunzel!' A voice cried from the staircase, and suddenly the others, led by Pascal, were racing into the corridor their wands and staff at the ready.

'Flippendo!' Merida cried as she neared, flinging Slytherins into a wall.

'Expelliamus, Tantalus Talentegra' a red light fired from Hiccup's wand disarmed another who then began to dance uncontrollably until he slipped on the suddenly icy floor.

Jack twirled his staff in a series of movements that sent icy hexes at his housemates, trapping them in ice or blinding them with snow.

This gave Rapunzel enough of a chance to use the counter spell for her legs and stand up to run and join the others who had formed into a tight huddle, their wands pointing towards the remaining Slytherins.

'So we finally see your true colours Frost,' Mulcaster said menacingly, his eyes red and watering.

'Green and silver, same as yours,' Jack replied angrily, 'Mine are just cleaner.'

The Slytherins raised their wands, preparing to strike again, and the four readied themselves to counter.

'ENOUGH!' A voice boomed, making them all turn to see Headmaster North standing in the entrance to the corridor, his red robes making him look like a vengeful warrior about to join the fray.

He strode towards the now cowering students and waved his wand angrily, making them all flinch. Instead of some terrible punishing curse that they all expected the only thing that happened was that the levitated Slytherins fell to the floor with a thump!

'Into my office,' he commanded angrily at the crowd, 'Now.'

* * *

><p>Author's note: So, my first real fight scene. I hope you enjoyed it (even if it was a little short).

**If any of you guys are wondering about Rapunzel's duelling style

this note is mainly here to tell you about it. Essentially after watching Tangled I came up with the idea that Rapunzel should have an unusual but effective fighting style (similar to her frying pan in the movie). This is why she can't use jinxes and hexes (the typical attacking spells), instead I plan for her to use her mastery in Charms and other magic to make up for it and make her a very unpredictable opponent.**

What do you guys think? I hope your still enjoying the story :)

5. The Search

The Search

The four sat in a side room to the Headmasters office, talking animatedly about what had happened.

'Did you see Merida blast that guy across the room,' Jack said excitedly as he bounced up and down on his chair, 'I swear the wall behind him cracked.'

'Hey ye don't mess with the Dunbrochs,' Merida boasted happily as she helped Rapunzel re-braid her hair, 'We're descended from a long line o' magical warriors.'

'I'm sorry I got you guys into this,' Rapunzel said for the hundredth time, 'I shouldn't have started it.'

'You didn't start it, those Slytherins did,' Hiccup reminded her reassuringly.

'When we arrived they were surroundin' ye,' Merida said angrily. 'Good work taking them down by the way. I could see the flashes from the staircase.'

'How did you find me anyway?'

'Pascal found Hiccup and me and told us to follow him,' Jack told her, still bouncing.

'I saw the Slytherins follow ye into the corridor and met the others on the way up,' Merida said in unison.

'You guys were amazing, but I shouldn't have used magic, that's why we're getting in trouble,' Rapunzel said, switching from positive to negative.

'Then again they were threatening to cut my hair. Yeah, they should be lucky I let them off so easy,' she continued, switching back to positive or at least angrier and less negative.

The other three all smiled at her knowingly, they'd grown used to these strange mood swings she sometimes went through when stressed.

The door opened, making the four jump as they had half-forgotten where they were, to reveal Professor North whose large body filled the frame.

'You four come in, I want to hear you're stories' side.'

They trudged in after the professor, glaring back at the Slytherins who were filing past them into the room they'd just left. They walked into the main office where North's desk sat in the middle of a room with rows of previous headmasters lining the walls, currently sleeping. The last row ended slightly shorter than the others the final portrait being of a woman with a stern face who had Minerva McGonagall inscribed beneath her. Professor North guided them to his desk and pointed to four chairs seated in front of it, which they sat in mutely.

'I've contacted your heads of house,' he informed them gruffly, 'they'll arrive once their classes have ended. Ah, speak of the devils.'

At his words the door behind the group opened and Professors Toothiana, Whittler, Bunnymund and Mansnoozie walked or flew in. They walked around the four and stood in line behind North, none of them looked happy.

'So now everyone's here, tell us your version of the story,' North continued calmly, settling back in his seat.

'How do we know you're going to listen? You chose to talk to the others first,' Jack blurted before he could help himself.

The other three turned to him incredulously from their seats while the teachers bristled angrily.

'Jack, what the hell?' Merida hissed at him.

'You should learn some respect for authority boy,' Bunnymund growled.

Bunnymund had never been fond of Jack since the boy's arrival at the school and Jack's disregard for rules and constant pranks had done nothing to lighten Bunnymund's feelings towards him. Bunnymund was also the Herbology professor at Hogwarts " much to the surprise of many students who had assumed he taught Care for Magical Creatures but were reminded that just because Bunnymund _was _one it didn't mean that he knew anything about other species.

At their first Herbology lesson Jack and Bunnymund's dislike for one another intensified when all the plants Jack handled would later die, or at least go into hibernation, whenever he touched them with his 'winter fingers'. Since then Jack had been forced to wear thick gloves in lessons and he and Bunnymund would constantly share hateful looks at each other.

'Now, now. There's no need to worry Jack, we will judge with no bias,' Professor North said, cutting over the others in his thick Russian accent.

'I was the one who started the fight; the others only got dragged into it afterwards. It wasn't their fault,' Rapunzel spoke up suddenly to the evident surprise of the teachers.

'_You_ started it Miss Solaris,' North asked shocked while a question

mark appeared over Mansnoozie's head. 'Why?'

'They were trying to cut my hair professor,' Rapunzel replied quietly looking at him in a conspiratorial way that the others didn't understand.

Images flashed rapidly above Mansnoozie again and several times the four could see a pair of scissors made in sand appear, snipping silently before being replaced again.

'Yes Sandy, there were many scissors at the scene,' North replied thoughtfully, 'and a few Slytherins were carrying some without explanation.'

'While that does give credit to your story I'm still curious as to why they wanted to cut your hair Rapunzel,' Toothiana said in her usual quick manner, leaning forward to inspect the students as she did so.

'I don't suppose it would have anything to do with the fact those same students had a nasty accident yesterday did it?'

The four looked guiltily at one another but didn't say anything as the looks from the professors indicated that they didn't have to, the teachers already knew.

'They called Rapunzel a mud-blood,' Hiccup muttered angrily, 'They had no right to call her that.'

There was a gasp beside him from Rapunzel and Merida who Jack and Hiccup had decided not to tell the specific reason they'd chosen the Slytherins as a target. There were similar expressions of surprise on the teachers' faces, with the exception of Whittler whose face had gone eerily blank.

'That is a very serious accusation Hiccup,' North said sternly, 'I hope you have evidence to prove it.'

'It was me who overheard it sir,' Jack took over, 'They called her it to my face in the common room, except for that though I have no proof.'

The headmaster nodded in understanding and turned to Professor Whittler.

'Do you think there is any grounds to Jack's claim Ursa?'

'Well there've always been a few students whose families haven't moved with the times,' Whittler said grudgingly. 'The prefects and I always get it out o' their system in the end though,' she added with satisfaction.

'Hmm, very well, bring the others in and we shall sort this out,' North ordered after a few more minutes silent deliberation.

The Slytherins were brought back in and walked around to stand behind the chairs the four had been sitting on a moment ago but had now left to stand further to the side, unwilling to turn their backs on the Slytherins.

'After hearing both sides of the argument I have decided to punish all of you,' North said when they had all settled and raised his hands to stop the tide of protests. 'It is against school rules to use magic on fellow students in the corridors and you all broke it.'

'So,' he continued, 'I am deducting fifty points from your housesâ€|each.'

At that there was a large sound of protest from the Slytherins and, surprisingly, Jack.

'Hang on Professor,' he said hurriedly, 'if you do that Slytherin loses all its house points, we won't have anything left.'

'Yeah, it's not fair if they get off easier,' said Mulcaster who hadn't realised he was agreeing with Jack until it was too late.

'And whose fault is that?' Professor Whittler snapped angrily. 'Ye all break the rules ye all pay the price.'

'Furthermore,' North continued calmly as if nothing was happening, 'you will receive extra punishment from your house masters, which we shall be discussing. You may all leave now.'

He ushered them all out the door which was tricky because the larger group of Slytherins were unwilling to stand close to the four which meant they all ended up crowding the stairway while the four were grudgingly forced into a corner. As he started to turn back into his office he stopped as if remembering something and turned back.

'Make sure I don't catch any of you again. If I do you will not get off so lightly,' he threatened sweetly before closing the door behind him.

'Thanks for that Frost,' Mulcaster sneered across the room, 'there's no way Slytherin's going to make up those points.'

'Why are you blaming him, you're the one who attacked me,' Rapunzel retorted, 'pretty poorly I might add.'

'Shut it Mud-blood,' Mulcaster jeered back, 'It's not like you'd have won that fight if your other losers hadn't interrupted.'

'Ha! Ye've got ta be kiddin' me. You were the ones who attacked her and you were too cowardly to do it alone,' Merida returned heatedly.

'Yeah and she still kicked your asses,' Jack added proudly.

'Just don't cross us again,' Mulcaster said, trying to sound menacing but failing entirely.

The Slytherins began to walk down the stairs into the corridor outside, giving the four, and especially Jack, nasty looks as they passed. Soon the entrance room was empty save the four.

'Well that went badly,' Merida said moodily. 'Ugh, I can just tell Toothiana's going ta have me sorting out old school records; she

knows I hate ta sit in dusty rooms.'

'Let's just forget it,' Hiccup said forlornly, 'Do you guys want to get lunch.'

'I'm not hungry,' Jack mumbled looking angrily at the floor and gripping his staff so tightly that his already pale knuckles were turning whiter.

'Me neither,' Rapunzel agreed, ignoring the sounds of protest from Pascal. 'Hey, you know what we have next?' She said, suddenly cheery again as they made their way down the staircase.

'Transfiguration,' Jack answered warily, already suspecting where Rapunzel was going with this.

'Exactly, so why don't Merida and Hiccup and I give you a quick lesson. I know you're still not getting the spells right,' Rapunzel continued, winking at the other two.

'You'll never take me alive!' Jack suddenly yelled gleefully and took off; leaving little ice trails with his staff to slip up Rapunzel who was running after him.

Merida and Hiccup looked at each other as the two hurried down the corridor and shrugged their shoulders as if to say, _we might as well_, before chasing after them. Hiccup jumping over the icy traps while Merida simply skidded along them.

* * *

><p>Back in the headmaster's office the teachers sat in a worried circle.<p>

'You know, I never thought it would happen this fast,' Toothiana said who was sitting down rather than hovering in mid-air, her usually vibrating wings barely moving which was a clear sign she was worried.

'They met on the _first_ day, I mean what are the odds,' Bunnymund said as he rubbed his eyes with a large paw.

'If only the hat had put 'em in the same house,' Whittler added despairingly, 'at least then they wouldn't be causin' as much trouble between the houses, ye know how the younger years are.'

'Not that I don't like young Frost in my house mind ye, he's a funny lad,' she continued hurriedly.

'A menace more like,' Bunnymund stated angrily, 'Always freezing the floors to slip people up or causing snowstorms in the middle of corridors that cover up classroom doors, he's a completeâ€|'

'Nevertheless,' North interrupted quickly, 'it has happened, they found each other, and we were told they would find unity through separation. I believe by separation it meant the houses, which means they are already fulfilling it.'

They all looked around to Sandy who was producing images quickly

above his head, including a silhouette they recognised easily.

'You're right Sandy; I'm afraid he'll get involved sooner as well. We have much less time than we realised,' North agreed.

'Are you sure we shouldn't tell them?' Bunnymund asked, 'It's wrong to keep them in the dark when they're in so much danger.'

'I know Bunny, but we were told they _mustn't_ know until they turn fifteen, we can't disobey it if they are to get through this.'

'Perhaps we should start trainin' 'em now and give 'em a head start,' Whittler said thoughtfully, 'That wouldn't be breakin' the rules.'

A question mark formed above Mansnoozie's head.

'We'd have to explain why we're training them though,' Tooth reminded her, 'and anyway, Madame Pomfrey has refused to teach Rapunzel until second year.'

'Not unless we disguise it as somethin' else, sayâ€|their punishments,' Whittler replied with a clever grin.

'What have you got in mind?' Bunnymund asked curiously.

'Well first I'll use the old red-glow ointment trick when I tell him. It gives ye this lovely intimidatin' lightin' that always gets to 'em and then I'll sayâ€|' Whittler started, leaning forward conspiratorially.

'Perhaps you could skip to the plan,' North suggested as they leaned in to listen to what she had to say.

* * *

><p>Dinner in the great hall that night was not a pleasant one for the four.<p>

The Slytherins pretended like Jack didn't exist or would stare hatefully at him and mutter something to their neighbour. They'd forced him to sit right at the end of the table on the edge of the bench and made sure his end had little to no good food. He sat, silently seething, while the Slytherins that had attacked Rapunzel sat in the centre of attention, answering questions about what had happened with stories that contradicted each other as the students added exaggerations and lies to each retelling.

The other three weren't having it any better. Rumours had already spread about the fight and none of them held the four in a good light. This meant their houses now viewed them with open suspicion, wondering if Jack would be the only one willing to turn his wand on fellow house members.

As such the four spent that dinner sitting in a quiet bubble while the noise of their tables echoed around them. Finally Merida had had enough.

'Oh for pity's sake,' she muttered loudly. She stood up angrily and

grabbed an apple off a silver plate before stalking over to the Ravenclaw table. She found Rapunzel close to the centre; the Ravenclaws were a little more accepting of her but if she tried to join a conversation they would turn away and ignore her again after only speaking a few awkward words.

Tapping Rapunzel on the shoulder she said, 'Go get Hiccup, if this lot don't want anythin' to do with us then we'll find our own place to eat.'

Rapunzel nodded in agreement and rose gratefully from her seat to hurry towards the Hufflepuff table. Merida on the other hand turned to the Slytherins and Jack. A loud muttering began along all the tables as the houses saw the two girls fanning out across the hall. The Slytherins at the table sat up warily as Merida grabbed Jack and repeated what she'd said to Rapunzel.

'Great idea,' he said loudly, smiling as he stepped away from the table and 'accidently' knocked a few people with his staff, 'I don't know why we didn't think of it sooner.'

The muttering grew louder as the four joined each other at the Hall's doors; people were now actively staring in bewilderment, including the teachers.

Together the four walked slowly out the door, nonchalantly turned a corner and, when they were out of sight, started running to get as far away as possible.

'Soâ€|what now?' Hiccup panted later when they'd run far enough away.

'Don't ask me,' Merida said gleefully, drunk on adrenalin, 'I only got this far.'

'Wait. Are you telling me you dragged us out of the Hall without knowing another way to get food?' Rapunzel asked incredulously, 'What am I saying, _of course_ you did.'

'We can worry about it tomorrow,' Jack said confidently as they started to walk down a corridor to find somewhere to spend the rest of the evening. 'We'll figure something out, and if we don't we can always live off packets of Bertie Bott's every flavour beans.'

'Oh Gods what have I signed up to,' Hiccup wailed comically.

'Don't worry Hiccup,' Jack said, cheerfully wrapping his arm around the boy's shoulder, 'We'll be sure to bankrupt ourselves to get you a good supply of incentives.'

'Yeah, ye luckless freak,' Merida joked at their side as she bit into her apple.

'Speaking of which, who'd like a game of Bertie Bott's fishing,' Rapunzel said as she brought a packet of beans from out her pocket.

'No!'

'Aw, come on Hiccup ye know ye want to, dad just sent me a new batch

of chocolate frogs this mornin'.'

'Alrightâ€¦fine.'

'Yes!'

'How many cards do you have now anyway?'

* * *

><p>It was a fortnight later and the Christmas holidays were looming which meant the time for the four to separate was drawing closer and they still hadn't found anywhere new to eat.<p>

Rapunzel sat in front of a large stack of books in the library, Pascal sitting on the table between her arms. She spent a lot of her free time there when she wasn't hanging out with the others, reading as many books as she could carry to the table.

The book currently open in front of her was a large Atlas. She kept flipping between pages, pointing to areas that she thought were interesting to Pascal. Gothel had never kept an atlas in the tower so as to prevent Rapunzel growing too interested in the outside world. Now that she was out of the tower Rapunzel had been trying to catch up on many things that she had never experienced and on the top of the list was seeing the world.

'Look Pascal, it's Berk,' Rapunzel said as she turned a page onto the map of a small island of the northern coasts of Scotland.

'Wow, so this must be where he found Toothless,' she continued, pointing towards a clump of forest away from the village, 'he talks about it so much I could find it with my eyes closed.'

'Yeah, he does like to talk about their little hole in the ground,' Jack said, walking up behind her, staff resting on his shoulder.

He slumped down onto the table, sitting in his usual slouched position with one bare foot resting on his crook.

'I think it's sweet,' Rapunzel replied, flipping through the atlas, 'I mean the story about him and Toothless drawing together was _so_ cute.'

'Yeah, cute. Anyway, are we any further along in finding a place to eat?' Jack said, switching to a topic that had been on everyone's mind.

* * *

><p>The four had been searching for a new source of food since the night they stormed out without much success. They originally had tried to find somewhere they could make food, Rapunzel had wanted to bake a cake or a few cookies for weeks, but their search had been fruitless.<p>

While they searched they had to sneak into the Great Hall when it was nearly empty to gather whatever food they could and they needed Pascal to carry plates from the table at dinner when the Hall was too full to get into without being seen.

Finally, after another failed search, Rapunzel had said, 'Okay, this clearly isn't working. Why don't we just look for whatever kitchens feed the Great Hall?'

'I didn't think there were kitchens,' Merida said with surprise, 'I just thought the food was magicked into existence.'

'I thought so too, but I looked it up,' Rapunzel explained, 'the necessary magic to make a small amount of food appear out of thin air is very difficult alone. I don't believe the staff _combined_ could make so much food appear, no matter how good they are.'

'Which means there must be a kitchen where the food is cooked,' Hiccup finished.

'Great,' Jack had cheered happily. 'How do we find it?'

'I have no idea.'

'_Great._'

* * *

><p>'I think it must be somewhere beneath the Hall itself so the food can rise up to the tables, that would be an easier charm,' Rapunzel explained in the present. 'This atlas has some pretty detailed drawings of Hogwarts as well as maps and by the looks of it there should be an entrance to a room beneath the Hall on the ground floor.'

'Hiccup's common room is on the ground floor right? Let's go and ask him if he's seen anything useful,' Jack said standing up, 'He and Merida are getting their post right now.'

'Alright, let me just put these books back,' Rapunzel agreed, gathering the books in her arms and placing them back in the right spot on their shelf while Jack hopped around impatiently.

Finally they set off for the Owlery in the West tower, it took them slightly longer than it should have because they had to hide in a corner to avoid Peeves as he whizzed down the corridor, setting off firecrackers he'd stolen from a sixth year.

They climbed up the spiral stairs and into the circular stone room that served as the Owlery. It was cold and drafty because none of the small windows around the wall had glass in them. The oncoming winter had meant that the room was colder than usual and ice was beginning to set on the straw covered floor, forcing Rapunzel to step carefully so as not to fall while Jack walked on the ice as if it wasn't there.

They found Hiccup and Merida at the topmost floor of the Owlery. Hiccup was feeding a small kipper to Tiny who was sitting on his shoulder while Merida attached a message to the leg of Angus, her black and white great-eared owl.

'Hey you two,' Merida said as Angus flew from her arm out the window. 'What are ye doin' here?'

'We've got a new idea about the kitchens,' Jack said proudly.

'_We?_' Rapunzel asked incredulously, '_I_ came up with the idea. I think it might be near to your common room Hiccup, oh fine Jack that bit was your idea. Can you think of anything that might help?'

'I don't know,' Hiccup answered as he scratched Tiny between his spiky ears, 'We sometimes see the teachers pass by the common room, which is weird because that corridor has a dead end.'

'Are ye telling me that Hiccup may have been sleeping a few feet away from what we've searched weeks for?' Merida asked as she tried to dislodge an owl feather that had lodged itself in her tangled hair.

They all stood quietly for a moment as they let that thought sink in. Eventually Rapunzel broke the awkward silence by saying slowly, 'I think we should go and check it out first before we get our hopes up.'

Nodding in agreement they left the Owlery after Hiccup let Tiny crawl back into his favourite spot, the small dragon slept curled in a hole in the wall rather than on a perch like the owls. The four sped quickly down the spiral stairs, weaved through different corridors and descended more steps until they reached the corridor where the Hufflepuff common room could be found.

Fortunately there weren't many Hufflepuffs walking around at that time of day so the corridor was free of any curious eyes that might follow them as they hurried to its end. They arrived at the dead end only to find a painting of a fruit bowl and nothing else.

'Well, so much for that idea,' Hiccup said despairingly.

'That's not good,' Rapunzel said distantly.

'Yeah, I really thought you had something there Rapunzel,' Jack agreed sadly.

'No, I mean the painting; it doesn't look like it's been treated as well as most of the others in the castle. Look, the area of canvas around the pear is more worn than the rest.'

'I don't see anythin',' Merida said as she squinted at the painting.

'Trust me.'

Rapunzel stepped closer to the painting to get a better look. To the uninitiated eye the canvas did indeed look perfectly normal but she could see that the fabric of the pear's side had been worn down slowly. She reached out her hand and stroked her finger gently along the damaged area of the fruit.

Instantly the pear began to squirm and shake with laughter, making Rapunzel jump back as the painting swung backwards to reveal a hidden room beyond. Hiccup stepped forward to look in and was greeted by the busy noise and commotion of a kitchen as small creatures whirled past, carrying plates and trays of freshly cooked food across the

large room. He stumbled in suddenly as the other three pushed him forward to get a look and the small creatures stopped in their tracks to stare at the intruders.

'Umâ€¦Hi,' Hiccup said nervously, intimidated by the hundreds of stares bearing down on him.

Many of the house-elves, for that's what they were, shrugged and carried about their work. A few, however, broke off from the constantly moving crowd and, smiling delightedly.

One asked in a high pitched voice, 'Is there any way in which we may serve the ladies and gentlemen?'

'Uh, you're house-elves right?' Jack asked, still trying to take in recent events.

'That is correct sir, are you sure you would not care for some drink? Or food?' The house-elf replied, still smiling.

'Sounds good,' Merida said happily to the house-elf's delight.

'We don't want to get in your way though,' Rapunzel said hurriedly as a team of house-elves brought in a round table and four chairs and began to set it with silver plates. 'You must be busy preparing dinner for upstairs.'

'We house-elves enjoy serving,' explained the elf that had spoken to them first, 'it is our honest pleasure to assist you in whatever you may need.'

He motioned for them to sit and soon the four were brought an exquisite selection of the very best food the elves could offer. They all quickly filled their plates and began to eat contentedly while the elf stood beside them and the other elves rushed around, setting plates on the five tables that mirrored the Great Hall above.

'What's your name,' Hiccup asked the elf suddenly as he looked up from his shepherd's pie.

'Grindl Master,' the elf replied humbly, bowing his head slightly in acknowledgment.

'You don't have to call me that, call me Hiccup,' Hiccup replied and was followed by the others as they introduced themselves.

'As you wish Master Hiccup,'

'So Grindl, are all of you house-elves servants for Professor North or do you just work here?' Jack asked curiously as he noticed that many of the elves wore at least a sock or some other small garment of clothing along with their usual rags, Grindl himself was wearing a pair of worn gloves and a very small scarf.

'We house-elves are now employed by Hogwarts. It used to be that we served the Headmasters as unpaid servants but through the work of Hermione Granger in the Ministry of Magic we were all offered the chance for freedom. Many of our more traditional brethren were resistant at first to this idea, we like to serve our masters and we

never asked to be made free but, over time, we learned we could be free and yet still work as before, only now we are paid in whatever clothes the teachers can give,' Grindl told them happily as he fingered his old scarf.

'_I_ chose freedom right away; I had always hoped to know the feeling of independence,' the elf told them wistfully.

The four continued eating as they listened to Grindl's stories about the lives of the house-elves while the food of the Great Hall vanished from the kitchen tables, presumably to appear at their house table counterparts. Eventually they were also joined by the house-elves who sat down at the large tables for their own more meagre meals, except Grindl who asked modestly if he may sit with them.

The four sat happily with him and the other elves, listening and talking to Grindl about whatever subjects they strayed onto. They spent every meal there for the rest of the year, arriving just after the meals were served above so as not to disturb the elves too much and staying for as long as they could until lessons began. Later they would all look back to that meal and realise it was probably the happiest they'd had since the opening feast.

* * *

><p>Author's note: Hi guys. If any of you are wondering about the timeline in this universe the four have arrived at Lily Potters seventh year. This means the year is currently 2026 (and the iPhone 18 is not going down well :P). I don't plan for the golden trio to make an appearance in the story (although you never know) but I may make a few references to them every now and then.

Well till next time, thanks for reading :)

6. The Detentions

The Detentions

The rest of the school term passed by quickly for the four, attending lessons and avoiding or sometimes pranking the houses without getting caught became a routine. They became experts at sabotage and pranks and life at Hogwarts grew bearable again. And then it all ended as the Christmas holidays arrived.

The four sat together again in the train carriage and shared whichever presents they'd been able to scrounge.

Merida was given a batch of home baked cookies from Rapunzel who'd baked them in the kitchens with Grindl and the other elves. Hiccup had made her a leather quiver that was better fitted to her than her old one and Jack handed over a large bag of cauldron cakes.

They all pitched in to give Rapunzel a new set of paints and brushes as well as two new books on advanced charms and magical history.

Jack received a bag of instant darkness powder from Hiccup, several packs of chocolate frogs from Merida and a portrait from Rapunzel

where she painted him flying a broom over the Black Lake.

Finally, Hiccup got a new sketchpad from Merida, new charcoal and pencils from Rapunzel. And Jack gave him a new set of tools for blacksmithing that he'd overheard Hiccup talking to Gobber about.

Christmas itself passed by in a blur; the four all regaled their parents with stories of Hogwarts and the others. They told all the weird and wonderful things about their friends; Hiccup's dragon, Rapunzel's hair, Jack's staff, Merida's skill at archery and swordsmanship and everything else they could think of.

Merida was greeted with joy and congratulations from her parents for making Gryffindor and spent Christmas morning teaching the triplets how to fight with the wooden swords their dad had bought them.

Hiccup was given an awkward congratulation from his father for being the first Berkian Hufflepuff, 'Always got ta be the first, don't ye Hiccup,' he'd said as he gave Hiccup another slap on the back.

Rapunzel was greeted with wonder from her muggle parents who asked her all kinds of questions about the wizarding world as they knew less than she did. She shared with them all the stories of her lessons and promised to demonstrate her powers when she was legally old enough.

Jack spent much of Christmas taking his sister out ice skating on the lake which he made sure was always thick with ice. He also entertained his mother in whatever way he could to keep her mind off Pitch Black's escape and helped her to serve the Christmas dinner that year.

None of the four mentioned their rejection by their houses; they didn't want their parents to worry.

* * *

><p>Now they were sitting back in the History of Magic classroom, listening to the droning voice of Professor Cuthbert Binns the only ghost teacher in the school. The old ghost did nothing in his classes but give endless and dull lectures, droning on about whichever topic they were studying without any enthusiasm or emotion of any kind.<p>

Hiccup and Jack were playing a surreptitious game of magical hangman, where the man actually walks up the gallows, in a desperate attempt to not die of boredom. Currently Jack was winning three games to one but Hiccup was trying to take back the lead by using Berkian words.

'Snogletogg! That's not a word!' Jack hissed angrily at him.

'Sure it is; it's Berk's version of Christmas,' Hiccup replied smugly, 'That's three to two by the way.'

'No fair Haddock!'

Merida was sitting next to them, her head, resting on her textbook, was barely visible under her tangled red hair but the occasional snore could be heard from beneath it.

Surprisingly Rapunzel was sleeping too, using her crossed arms as a pillow while Pascal lay curled in her braid. What was more surprising, and irritating, for the three was that Rapunzel actually got good marks in tests and on homework even though she had slept through every lesson since the first.

'It's because she reads so much,' Merida mumbled to the others sleepily as they left the classroom, 'she learns all about it outside the lesson.'

'She'll probably know more than Binns by the end of the year,' Hiccup said moodily, he'd lost the game against Jack eventually.

'Don't look so sad Hiccup,' Jack said happily as Rapunzel caught them up, rubbing her eyes. 'It's the first quidditch game today, Hufflepuff verses Slytherin.'

'We better hurry then,' Merida said, excitedly pulling Hiccup and Rapunzel after Jack and her. 'We don't want to miss the first game.'

The four hurried down the corridors and parted to drop off their books in their common rooms. They also grabbed their house scarfs to wear at the stadium and met back outside the castle.

'Come on Jack, you have to need your scarf now,' Rapunzel said, her voice slightly muffled as her head was wrapped tightly in her own blue and bronze scarf.

Jack walked with his scarf hanging from his shoulders but not wrapped around his neck. He smiled at her as he walked alongside the gravel path on the frozen grass, the earth now too cold to be mud.

'I'm only bringing it along for the house colours, we all did agree that quidditch would be the one thing we supported our houses in,' he said as he twirled the scarf, 'My winter magic stops me from getting cold no matter how low it is, pretty cool huh?'

The three groaned at Jack's bad pun as they reached the quidditch pitch. They could already hear the roaring of the houses from the raised towers that dotted each corner but were stopped however by the heads of house standing in front of the entranceway.

'I don't know where ye think yer goin', ' Whittler said pleasantly.

'Aren't we allowed to watch the match?' Hiccup asked worried.

'No, I'm afraid you'll be missing the quidditch matches this year,' Toothiana replied.

'You're detentions have been organised to spread over the rest of the year and they just happen to clash with every quidditch game this year,' Bunnymund continued happily.

'What! But Professor,' Merida pleaded to Toothiana. Quidditch was her

and Jack's favourite sport and she couldn't believe they were being forced to miss it.

'No arguments, you'll have plenty of time to watch the games next year,' Toothiana said in a surprisingly stern manner.

'So, if that's settled, Jack yer're ta work with Professor Maximus, I'd hurry if I were you he'll be gettin' impatient,' Whittler said, cheerily shooin Jack off.

'Merida you're going to join Jack, but,' Toothiana said, raising her finger at the happy look on Merida's face, 'he'll be working you two to the bone. I doubt you'll be having much fun.'

'Go and help Gobber work with the creatures in the forbidden forest,' Bunnymund told Hiccup gruffly.

A series of images appeared above Mansnoozie's head with the most prominent being the image of a medical cross and a birds wing.

'I have to go and work in the hospital wing?' Rapunzel guessed to the nodding of Mansnoozie who then ushered them to leave.

The four looked at one another in confusion, the detentions didn't sound that bad, before turning and heading away to their different locations. Hiccup split off from the rest of the group first, heading down to Gobber's hut, and soon disappeared from view as the others headed inside the castle.

The head teachers smiled at each other and turned around to head into the pitch.

'What do ye say Sandy, a galleon for the winner?' Whittler asked conversationally.

An image of a thumbs-up appeared above Mansnoozie's head and the two shook hands before they parted to join their houses.

* * *

><p>Rapunzel headed up the stairs of the hospital tower, alone except for Pascal, Hogwarts was practically empty while everyone went out to watch the game. She opened the door cautiously; unsure of what she was going to see as she'd never been in the hospital wing before.<p>

'Ah you're here at last,' a voice said from the far end of the room. It had been spoken by a woman dressed in a nurse's outfit who was attending to a young boy lying in one of the beds that lined the room.

She left the boy to drink a potion and walked quickly towards Rapunzel who had to stop herself from stepping back in fear.

'I didn't agree to this,' the woman continued as she looked Rapunzel up and down, 'I didn't want to teach you anything until the second year but Nicholas is using this detention of yours as an excuse to get you in early. Well, we might as well get started, follow me.'

She took Rapunzel to a small office in the back of the hospital and handed her an armband with a red cross to wear. She then took Rapunzel into the hospital wing and introduced her to the current patients in the beds.

'I had a few of your victims in here last term,' the woman who was called Madam Pomfrey said conversationally to Rapunzel, 'nasty head wounds you gave them.'

'Ohâ€|sorry about that,' Rapunzel apologised as she trailed after the nurse.

'Just don't do it again. Now Tom here is suffering from painful stomach cramps from eating a pound of knoxy eggs, which means we're going to have to brew a potion to cure it.'

Rapunzel spent the rest of the day learning the recipes to make curing potions and the incantations of certain healing spells. She realised she was enjoying herself and by the end of the day she was already making suggestions to Madam Pomfrey about which spell or potion would be most useful.

As the sun began to set and the small flow of sick children ended, Pomfrey took Rapunzel back into her office and sat her down at a small table while she prepared a cup of tea.

She sat down to face Rapunzel, placing a tray laden with a teapot, two cups and a plate of biscuits in front of them and began to pour Rapunzel a cup.

'I'm sure you're aware why the staff have sent you to me,' she said calmly, 'your unique skills are of great interest to them and they want to know how skilled you'll become. I can already vouch that you have an aptitude for charms; Mansnoozie is very impressed at your work, which suggests you will have some skill at healing.'

Pomfrey pushed her sleeve up her skinny arm, took out a small scalpel from her robe pocket and raised it to her skin.

'Wait!' Rapunzel cried, reaching out to grab the hand holding the scalpel while Pascal chirped in alarm. 'I don't like to use my hair; I'm supposed to keep it secret.'

'I never said anything about your hair,' Pomfrey reminded her as she prized Rapunzel off with surprising strength for someone her age. Before Rapunzel could react the nurse quickly made a small cut on her arm and put the scalpel down.

'You watched me heal a few injuries like this today so you know the incantation. You should know before you start that it is impossible for a third year to perform this spell let alone a first year so there's no pressure.'

Pomfrey looked expectantly at Rapunzel who looked back, confused, until she realised what was expected of her and drew out her wand. She tentatively pointed her wand towards the cut which had begun to bleed down Pomfrey's arm.

'Episkey,' she said and felt the familiar glow of magic as it travelled through her wand and lit the tip in soothing white

light.

The cut on Pomfrey's arm closed slowly as it was bathed in the light of Rapunzel's wand and Madame Pomfrey gave a small sigh.

'Well done Solaris, you do have talent,' Pomfrey told her as she rolled her sleeve back down, 'finish your tea and you may go for today.'

They sat in mutual silence as they finished their tea and Pascal ate a biscuit happily. Once she'd finished Rapunzel stood up to leave and said her goodbyes as she walked to the door.

Just as she was stepping outside Pomfrey called after her, 'Until next week then Solaris.'

'Uhâ€|yes, see you then,' she called back as she left the wing.

Rapunzel walked quietly down the stairs until she turned a corner and swept quickly into a side corridor. She held Pascal in her cupped hands and talked excitedly with him about what had happened for the next fifteen minutes.

* * *

><p>Hiccup met Gobber outside his hut; the large scot had switched his mechanical arm with a large axe today, and greeted him with the usual hello before Toothless barrelled him over.<p>

'Getting into fights in yer first year Hiccup? Well I really don't know,' the blacksmith had said before wiping a happy tear from his eye. 'Your father must be so proud.'

'Anyway get Toothless ready for a walk, I'm takin' ye into the Forbidden Forest today,' he said in a business-like tone as he sharpened his arm.

'Is the axe really necessary?' Hiccup asked nervously as he stroked Toothless' snout.

'More useful than necessary, always better ta have it than not.'

'_Great_.'

Gobber led the way as they entered the forest, Hiccup and Toothless walking slightly behind him. As they passed the treeline the sunlight above them was cut out and the three were left in semi-darkness. Hiccup wasn't sure for how long they walked, it could have been five minutes or five hours he couldn't tell in this dark. Suddenly Gobber stopped and knelt down at a patch of shrub.

'Hiccup come and look at this,' he whispered, ushering Hiccup forward.

Hiccup looked at where Gobber was pointing and saw dangling on the branches a few fine silver hairs. Toothless leaned forward and sniffed them gently and gave a content sigh of happiness.

'Unicorn hairs,' Gobber informed him as he carefully picked the thin hairs from the bushes, 'Olivander always pays a fair sum fer these so keep a look out. These look pretty fresh too, stay quiet and we'll see if we can find him.'

An ironic statement coming from Gobber, the man with a wooden peg leg that made it almost impossible not to make a noise as he crashed through the shrubbery. Hiccup followed him warily, although he never believed they would find it. Toothless suddenly raised his head and sniffed the air as the wind changed. He tugged Hiccup forward and slightly to the left of where Gobber was heading.

'Toothless we're supposed to stay with Gobber,' Hiccup hissed as he struggled to drag the dragon back onto the path.

Soon Toothless brought Hiccup into a clearing where a few patches of sunlight were still visible between the leaves of the overhanging trees. Hiccup kept trying to pull the dragon after Gobber but Toothless sat back on his haunches stubbornly and motioned to Hiccup to look forward. He looked around wearily at whatever Toothless was so interested in, and froze. In the clearing lay a topless boy who looked slightly older than him, he was lying on the ground and struggling with something Hiccup couldn't see between the trees. Without thinking Hiccup left Toothless and stepped forward to help, he stepped out into the open to see the boy clearly and nearly yelled out in surprise.

The boy was a centaur, Hiccup couldn't see his horse's body before because it had been blocked from view but now he could see it in full view. He could now see the boy was struggling with a leg that was bent the wrong way and his side which was bleeding slightly from a deep scratch. The boy saw Hiccup immediately and twisted around to grab a bow and arrow and swiftly drew it to point at Hiccup.

'Wait! I'm not trying to hurt you!' Hiccup yelled quickly, raising his hands.

'Get out the way you idiot there's something behind you!' the centaur yelled back, looking behind Hiccup.

Hiccup looked around too to see what the boy was pointing at and saw Toothless slinking out after him from the trees and sighed with relief. 'It's alright he's with me,' he told the boy as Toothless joined him at his side still staring curiously at the boy.

'Oh I'm so relievedâ€|Ah!' the boy returned sarcastically, crying out in pain as he shifted his leg unintentionally.

'Toothless go get me some wood from the trees,' Hiccup told the dragon who nodded and zoomed off across the ground. Hiccup watched the dragon leave and knelt down to the boy who had lowered his bow but was still watching him warily. 'Can I take a look?'

'No you can't _take a look_ human. I don't need your help.'

'I don't know, it looks broken to me,' Hiccup continued half to himself, 'I could make you a splint, I'm pretty good at making things.'

'What's your name human?' the boy asked in an annoyed tone.

'Hiccup. What's yours?'

'Farris. And know this _Hiccup_, centaurs don't take help from humans so you can take your splint and shove itâ€|'

The rest of Farris' curse was lost at the sound of hoof beats began to echo through the clearing and shake the ground beneath them. In an instant twenty fully grown centaurs charged into the clearing and all aimed their already drawn arrows at Hiccup's head.

'Uh dad, wait before youâ€|' Farris stammered quickly but was cut off before he could finish.

'Get away from my son human!' The lead centaur yelled as he loosened his fingers around the arrow, ready to let it fly.

Hiccup was frozen in place with fear until he heard the familiar screeching cry that signalled an angry Toothless. The dragon appeared to the lead centaur's side and blew a large fireball at his feet that sent him stumbling back from the shockwave. Toothless ran to Hiccup's side and bared his fangs in challenge to the centaurs who all stood back in alarm and surprise.

'Dad it's alright the unicorn did this to me not the human,' Farris said quickly before anything else could happen.

'I thought unicorns were supposed to be nice,' Hiccup whispered from the side of his mouth.

'It's a wild horse with a giant horn on its head genius,' Farris hissed back angrily.

'Why are you in our forests human?' The lead centaur asked, arrow now swinging between Hiccup and Toothless.

'Iâ€|uh, I came with Gobber,' Hiccup tried earnestly while Toothless watched the group darkly.

'Aye he's with me,' Gobber's voice called as he appeared out from the trees.

'This boy is trespassing on our territory Gobber and he has made no agreement with us to do so,' the centaur stated flatly in a warning tone, 'this is a serious offence.'

'Pipe down Abhora,' Gobber retorted angrily, 'the boy is with me, and if our agreement extends to me it does to him.'

'He brought a dragon! A dangerous beast that threatened my son!'

'That dragon will bring ye no harm as long as ye don't threaten him or Hiccup. Which is why I suggest ye lower the bow.'

The centaurs were reluctant to do so at first but Gobber kept persuading them until they gave in, the looks Toothless was giving them also helped. Gobber and Abhora then spent the next few minutes in a heated argument that they made sure the two boys couldn't hear. Eventually they broke and walked or trotted over to the two who were

sitting sheepishly with Toothless lying in front of them. Abhora helped Farris stand up and guided him back into the undergrowth without looking or talking to Hiccup, although Farris did look back curiously before they disappeared.

Gobber waited for the rest of the hunting party to leave before he dragged Hiccup out of the clearing by his ear while Toothless wandered after them.

'What did I say about stickin' close,' he demanded angrily when they'd returned to the path, 'there are worse things in here than centaurs Hiccup, ye could have been hurt.'

'Sorry Gobber, Toothless dragged me away,' Hiccup said apologetically while Toothless sniffed around at his feet.

'Yer goin' ta have ta learn a lot if yer to come in here,' Gobber scolded as they walked deeper into the forest, 'and from now on yer ta stick close until I say ye know enough ta walk around here on yer own.'

'Now,' he continued as they entered another more open clearing, 'why don't we get started with the real trainin''

* * *

><p>Jack and Merida headed into the Defence Against the Dark Arts classroom where Professor Maximus was waiting for them.<p>

He was a tall man with white hair similar to Jack's. Even when standing you could see how his muscles always seemed poised and ready for action, a natural state that you could only achieve after being one of the best Aurors in the world, now retired of course. He was a strict teacher, but kind too in his way. He would expect the highest standards from his students and would work them hard to achieve the results he wanted; however, if a student was hurt during a practise duel he would be the first to react, more caring than even their friends.

He stood in the centre of the room which was currently bare as the tables and chairs had been piled against the wall. Without them the room was much larger and provided enough space for the three to move freely about without the risk of hitting anything which of course was Maximus's plan.

'You're late,' he stated as they walked in, looking at his watch.

'Sorry sir we we're only told to go to you at the quidditch pitch,' Jack apologised as he and Merida stood before the teacher.

'That's not the point, next week I expect you both to get here earlier to make up for lost time,' the professor returned sternly.

'What do ye actually want us to do Professor?' Merida asked curiously as she looked around the empty room.

'Think of this as an advanced Defence Against the Dark Arts class,' he told her, striding forward to look them both in the eye, 'You two

are superb duellists and I'd been hoping for an excuse to accelerate your learning.'

'Although neither of you ever hand in your homework,' he muttered under his breath.

'So it's just like normal class, _great_, ' Jack said, excitedly clapping his hands together.

'Oh I wouldn't get too happy about it,' Maximus said pleasantly, 'there's only one way you can prove to me that you've passed this class.'

'How?'

'By beating me in a duel,' he answered, drawing his wand from the folds of his robes, 'care to test your worth?'

The two looked at Maximus, standing ready in a fighting stance, and then to each other. Jack shrugged and stepped forward first, raising his staff in readiness. He bowed his head to the professor as he had been taught in class to do whenever you started a duel.

In a flash Maximus had halved the distance between them, changing from standing still to a full gallop without reaching any speed in-between. Jack stumbled back in surprise but had enough time to raise his staff and fire a bolt of ice at the teacher's chest, hoping to slow him down. Maximus spun to the side and dodged the bolt as it passed and before Jack could try again he'd been knocked down, his legs kicked out from under him while Maximus stood and pointed his wand at Jack's heart.

'You didn't bow,' Jack accused him angrily as he stood up.

'Anyone trying to curse you won't bow, and they aren't going to let you get up,' Maximus reminded him nonchalantly, 'Want a go Merida?'

'Sure.'

Maximus returned to his previous position in front of them and Merida stepped forward, her wand at the ready. They stood waiting for the other to make the first move, squaring each other up. Merida moved first, she flicked her wand to use the flippendo spell which Maximus dodged easily. He stepped forward smartly and pushed Merida's arm out the way to point at Jack as she let loose another spell which sent him toppling to the floor. Then the world went upside down.

After she righted herself and helped Jack stand up she looked sulkily at Maximus.

'Ye didn't even use magic,' she said dejectedly.

'Of course not. I didn't have to,' Maximus told her as he put a hand on both their shoulders, 'I have had years to master magic and other forms of battle. I know the Dunbrochs train their families in physical as well as magical combat and the Frosts have their own skills but you both have much to learn before you're ready to fight me.'

'Now face each other,' he commanded as he stepped back, 'You're going to spend the rest of the lesson practising your duelling magic and your movements. This isn't like normal class, I don't want you to let the other hit you so they can learn the spell. I expect both of you to dodge every spell that's sent at you. And don't hold back, if your opponent gets hit it's their own fault.'

At his urging the two stood in front of each other, a couple of feet apart, their wand and staff once more at the ready. Jack jumped suddenly forward and spun his staff to send a flurry of ice bolts at Merida but she was faster and had already sidestepped around them, firing a jinx of her own. Jack called the winds and rose up above her spell but now he was an easier target in mid-air and Merida fired a second spell at him, forcing him to call the winds off immediately and fall heavily to the ground to avoid it.

He flung his crook around, trying to catch Merida's ankles with its hook but she jumped over it and landed behind him as he staggered up. Before she could open her mouth Jack spun, his staff glowing blue with magic, hoping to freeze her with a close contact spell but she flung herself backwards at the last minute, just missing the end of the staff.

She charged him again, hoping to use her superior combat skills to counter his ice magic but he froze the ground between them, covering it in a slippery film of ice that would surely make her fall. Merida didn't slow down but instead of running head on she altered her trajectory towards the wall where she jumped onto the edge of a desk and immediately off again sending a spell in mid-air as she soared towards him.

Jack jumped away from the spell but then had Merida herself bearing down on him as she landed on solid ground. She had jumped close enough to force him constantly back as he tried to avoid her spells and kicks. He was unbalanced and she knew it as she pressed him further back, hoping to open a weak spot, and there it was!

Jack had tripped at her last kick and watched as Merida raised her wand for the final strike that would hit him without any doubt. Out of desperation more than anything he resorted to an old trick and before he realised it a snowball had formed in his hand, without thinking he threw it. It didn't hit anywhere vulnerable but it distracted Merida for the briefest second and that was all Jack needed. He pointed his staff and Merida was knocked down by a small snowy explosion, sliding backwards on the still icy floor.

'Well done,' Maximus told them as he watched, sitting on his desk in the farthest point away from their fight.

'Damn Frost I thought I had you,' Merida cheered happily as he helped her up and dispelled the ice on the floor.

'That was great, the way you jumped off that desk. So cool,' Jack returned excitedly, the two rejoicing in the adrenalin rush from the fight.

'A good first go but you're both still holding back,' Maximus interrupted as he stepped between them, 'I said go all out, if you get hurt Madame Pomfrey can cure it.'

'In addition,' he continued quickly, 'Jack you need to work on your movements, you were rarely advancing _at_ Merida in the fight; you kept allowing yourself to be pushed back. And Merida I want you to be more imaginative with your spells, while I know I haven't taught you as wide a variety as you will learn I expect you to start coming in with spells you've taught yourself outside class, and yes that does mean reading and research. The element of surprise is a great gift in any fight, keep them on their toes.'

The two nodded in solemn agreement as he instructed them, although Merida rolled her eyes, and took mental notes to his criticisms.

'Now then,' the professor said as he settled back onto his desk, 'Again.'

By the end of the lesson the sun had set and Merida and Jack staggered out, bloodied and bruised but smiling so much it looked as if the tops of their heads might fall off. They slowly limped their way back to their common rooms where the rest of the houses had already returned.

Both houses had planned on making a snide comment about how they'd had to miss the match. The Slytherins also planned on complaining that Jack's detention, whatever it was, was nowhere near as bad as having to polish the trophy room for five hours without magic. That is until they saw the two's appearance, as if they'd just been beaten into the ground by a giant, and stayed quiet as the two passed through the common room and fell full length onto their beds and fell asleep fully clothed but content.

* * *

><p>The four grew to love their detentions more and more as the year went by until for a few weeks it was all they could talk about with each other. Eventually, however, the time came when their focus was taken up by revision for the upcoming exams and their detentions became less frequent to allow for revision time. Sooner than they realised, they were all sitting in classrooms writing exams or performing in the practical tests.<p>

In the Great Hall above them the exams for the next day were all anyone could talk about, every conversation was about their anticipation or excitement for different subjects. The teachers looked amusedly over the groups of students huddling around each other to discuss answers or what they thought would be asked of them in the practical tests.

The lights from the Great Hall illuminated the grass of the grounds outside from the high windows where the echoes of worried students faded; everything was brightly lit despite the closing night, except for the Dark Forest. The great trees blocked off all light to the inside, leaving nothing but darkness and shadow.

From that darkness small pinpricks of light started to appear. The glowing yellow eyes of the Nightmares sparkled among the trees as they gathered in front of the magical barrier that protected Hogwarts.

Pitch Black strode between them, the dirty rags of Azkaban replaced

by beautiful flowing black robes that blended with the shadows so supremely that the wizard could barely be seen in the night.

'Hello Hogwarts,' he said smoothly, as if greeting an old friend. 'It's been too long.'

He motioned to the lead Nightmare to step forward with his hand. The Nightmare obeyed immediately, slowly stepping across the grass and over tree roots until it stood before the invisible barrier of Hogwarts. It hesitated for the briefest moment but after sensing the impatience of its master it walked forward into the killing magic.

Nothing happened. The Nightmares were unknown to the spells that formed the shield and could slip through it without harm, just as Black had planned.

'The Guardians have failed to guard,' Black stated as he calmly stroked the Nightmares flanking him, 'and tomorrow, they will fail to protect.'

7. The Attack

****The Attack****

The bell tolled two o'clock and a stream of grateful students washed out from their final exams. Every face wore a similar expression of exhaustion and dread as the students slowly filed away, taken by the flow of people around them without any real sense of direction. The four stumbled out a few minutes after everyone else to avoid being intentionally jostled by the crowd but shared their expression.

'Thatâ€¦wasâ€¦awful,' Merida moaned as they walked away from the History of Magic classroom where they'd taken their final test.

'I swear Binns never taught us half of that,' Jack complained beside her.

'You probably just weren't listening,' Rapunzel muttered back as she rubbed her temples, she'd found the test pretty hard too.

'As if you'd know!'

'Even copying your notes didn't help Rapunzel,' Hiccup told her as they rounded a corner. 'All I could remember was the Goblin revolution in 1891.'

'1623,' Rapunzel corrected him, grinning apologetically.

'Oh no, really? I wrote half my essay on that!' Hiccup complained to the faint smiles of the others.

The four had all been wiped out by the exam which had included two of the hardest essay questions they'd ever been set. It had been a terrible hour of dates and times and struggling to remember half-heard lectures that had managed to suck the energy from them in the first ten minutes. They all agreed without saying a word that they would return to their common rooms to sleep the exam off like a

bad headache and stopped at the end of the corridor to say their goodbyes before they split up.

BOOM! An explosion erupted around them as the wall that faced the school grounds exploded inwards and threw the four to the floor. They lay there, dazed and confused among the rubble as screams accompanied other explosions throughout the school and black shapes sped over them from the newly opened hole in the wall. They staggered to their feet as their heads cleared and they could all think again.

'What was that?' Merida yelled as they heard more explosions further away, her heart pounding fast in her chest.

'What are _they_?' Hiccup asked in return, pointing at two of the black figures that had passed them and were now curving back around.

The things slowed and stood in mid-air for a moment as they sniffed the four's scent, searching for their fears. Now the creatures were closer the four could see they were in the shape of horses but with muscles made from a combination of black sand and mist. The horse creatures had smelled enough and, after only a second's pause, charged at the three, their nostrils flaring. The four reeled back as the horses neared, terror clutched at them as images of their most feared thoughts sprang to their minds. They stood, paralyzed as the horses rose to send their dark hooves crushing down upon the four's skulls.

A bright shock of light flashed before them and the horses vanished in an explosion of dead sand. A red haired girl ran up the steps, her wand still glowing from her spell, and looked the four up and down quickly to check for any signs of harm. The four breathed out as the heart clenching fear left them and with relief at the sight of Lily Potter, Head Girl. They all felt better now that someone in charge was nearby.

'All of you get to your common rooms,' she ordered hurriedly, 'you'll be less affected by those things next time so you won't get frozen again. Go now!'

Her last words were yelled as more horses swarmed through the hole and surrounded her in a sphere of swirling sand. The four moved forward to help her, the fear the creatures had summoned before _was_ weaker and they weren't going to abandon the woman who'd just saved them.

'I said GO!' Lily's voice roared from within the shadows.

The four stopped, unsure and expecting the worst, but saw that within the sphere that lights were starting to emerge and gaps were appearing as the monsters were slain into clouds of sand. They could see Lily in the centre, weaving amongst the black shapes and waving her wand ferociously, sending out spell after spell at the creatures and never tiring, her face a mixture of concentration and anger.

'She's winning, come on,' Rapunzel decided for them as the sphere grew even thinner and the four ran past the dark cloud and down the stairs, not for their common rooms but to find how much of the school was under attack.

They raced down the stairs and into another corridor that was empty of any enemy but echoed with the sounds of fighting further away. They turned a corner onto the Grand Staircase and there they found the source of the sounds. From every floor and every staircase students fought the horses, spells ricocheting off walls and steps as students missed and horses dodged.

A group of the things galloped over the stairs the four were standing on and turned to charge them from the air. Jack sprang towards them as he summoned the winds to carry him and swung at the first, disintegrating it with the touch of a freezing spell. More were destroyed a second later as Rapunzel lifted and fired rubble at them like machine gun fire. One managed to dodge the rocks and reach Merida who jumped out the way as it tried to ram her and fired a spell point blank into its head which took the body with it in the resulting blast. Hiccup destroyed the last by using the incendiary spell to spit fire at the creatures, burning them into smouldering heaps.

More monsters appeared behind them and the four readied themselves for another strike. Before they could move the horses vanished, exploding one by one as two boomerangs sailed through the air in a graceful and deadly arc. Bunnymund caught them in mid-air as he jumped to deliver a kick to another horse as it attacked a second year and spun to send them flying again.

'First and second years get to safety now!' He ordered as he drew two small eggs from a pouch and threw them to create a covering multi-coloured smokescreen for the younger years to escape in.

'You four too!' He called out to the four as they tried to charge back into the fray, 'This isn't your fight, stay sheltered.'

Having slaughtered all the horses on the current floor Bunnymund left the four to descend the stairs as he climbed further up to deal with the enemy there. They did, deciding that Bunnymund could take care of himself and ran down the stairs to join the fights below.

They reached the bottom where the large area in front of the Great Hall had become a battle ground. There must have been hundreds of students and horses in constant motions of battle while around the edges younger years were hurried behind the doors of the Great Hall itself to barricade themselves in.

Suddenly from within the dungeons Professor Whittler burst forth, wand at the ready, and charged into the centre followed quickly by every sharp potions knife in the dungeons that cut through horse after horse in a flurry of steel. The old witch waded through the centre of the maelstrom as her knives cut a deadly path around her, killing any horse that got too close to the Great Hall.

A first year suddenly ran past them as a horse charged him down, easily outpacing the crying boy. It was all the four needed to jump in themselves.

'Wingardium Leviosa!' Rapunzel cried and the horse was immediately crushed under a large piece of rubble that she floated above it, giving the boy a chance to escape into the Great Hall.

Another horse reared behind her but was struck down by Merida who then pivoted and killed a second that was charging her from the side. Hiccup and Jack were fighting together to take down a large pack of creatures that were trying to break through the students to get to the Hall. Jack's staff threw razor sharp icicles through the pack while Hiccup tripped them up using Tantalus Talentegra so the horses' four legs skittered and tangled in a jolly jig, causing them to fall to the floor and get crushed underfoot by the horses advancing behind them.

Even with the attempts of the students the horses were gaining ground and soon the children found themselves being pushed back further and further against the doors they were trying to protect. The horses began to whinny and cry with excitement as they felt the fear of the first years within the Hall and the exhaustion of the rest of the students.

A large war cried sounded as the rest of the teachers landed down the staircase and began to pummel the horses from behind. Headmaster North lead the charge, his wand in one hand and a curved scimitar in the other, cutting and cursing his way through the black sea. Toothiana flew at the beasts, ripping through them by hand and firing spells to catch horses that tried to fly after her. Mansnoozie summoned a golden whip at the tip of his wand and used it to lash and rip away the leading horses to give the students more breathing space.

With the aid of the teachers the fight turned and soon the horses were being backed out of the school and into the courtyard. While this was a good sign of the battle it also meant the fighting grew more spread out and the four found themselves growing steadily apart as they chased down more monsters.

Jack began to specialise in catching the ones that flew up in the air to escape the fight. He flew on the wintry winds and struck down as many that came at him while maintaining an unparalleled view of the battle, watching out for any stray horses that might be missed by the others. It was because of this that Jack saw him.

Pitch Black was standing at the edge of the Forbidden Forest watching Jack flying above the fight with a look of amusement. When he saw that Jack had noticed him, Black turned sedately on his heel and wandered further into the cover of the trees, out of sight.

Jack floated on the winds for a moment, stunned by the revelation. Pitch Black? This was because of him. Jack gritted his teeth in anger; the air around him growing colder as his magic reacted to his emotions.

Black was trying to hurt his school, his friends, kill them even. He was going to take these things from Jack like he'd taken Jack's father.

NO! I won't let it happen; _he thought angrily as he began to descend to the forest, _I'll kill him. I won't let him hurt them too. I'll kill him first or die trying!_

He banished the winds as he landed at the edge of the forest. Ice began to form on the barks of the tree in his presence as he walked below their leaves, his staff raised to strike at the slightest

movement.

'Show yourself Black! Face me!' He called into the shadows of the forest as he advanced.

'So eager to die little Frost?' A voice drawled back from deeper in, 'Well, like father like son I suppose.'

'Shut up!' Jack yelled back as he fired an ice bolt at a moving shadow but hit nothing. 'You're nothing but a coward; otherwise you'd have come out and fought me in the open.'

'In the open? How could I do that when I couldn't pass the barrier that protects Hogwarts? No, I needed you to come to me,' Black's voice echoed through the trees, except for the last line which sounded as if it was spoken behind him.

Swiftly Jack spun around and fired another bolt at Black who waved his wand lazily and deflected it with ease.

'Thank you for your cooperation,' the dark wizard continued as he stood between Jack and Hogwarts, blocking off any escape.

* * *

><p>Merida finished off the last horse in the courtyard that had been trying to sneak around to strike her from behind. She cheered with the others as she saw the rest of the horses escaping back to the dark confines of the Forbidden Forest.<p>

'Thank gods that's over,' Hiccup cheered behind her, his face covered in soot and dirt.

'I wonder what those things were,' Rapunzel said to them as she arrived from across the field where she'd been assisting a pair of third years. 'I don't think I've seen them in any book.'

'At least they're gone. We don't have ta worry about it now,' Merida said triumphantly. 'Where's Jack by the way? I've got a kill count ta compare.'

'He was in the air the last time I saw him,' Hiccup told her, shading his eyes as he looked into the sky.

'Ha, he knows I got more and he's hidin' like a wee babe,' Merida laughed eagerly as she began to look around the yard for signs of the white haired boy.

'Uh guys,' Rapunzel said pointing to a group of trees with their sides frozen in ice. 'I think he went that way.'

'Yeah, only he'd leave ice in this weather,' Hiccup agreed as he followed Rapunzel's gaze, the hot summer sun had been beaming a constant warm glow for the last week.

'Hiccup, go get Toothless,' Merida ordered suddenly as she gripped her wand again.

'What's wrong?' Rapunzel asked worried.

'That's the same direction those horses went.'

* * *

><p>Jack weaved through the trees as he tried to dodge Black's dark spells which seared through the forest, cutting down anything in their path. He turned back and fired more of his own spells but to no effect as Black blocked everything sent at him.<p>

'I admit I'm amused,' Black drawled slowly as he sent shadow knives firing at Jack who jumped behind another tree. 'A staff wielder at your age and magic without an incantation. You truly have talent.'

Jack froze the ground beneath pitch and sent an icy gale at the man who smiled and waved his wand to create a swirl of black flames that melted the ground and burned the winds away.

'Honestly this is pathetic,' he suddenly sneered as he deflected another ice bolt, 'Where's the other winter magic Jack? Your father was impressive; he had tricks up his sleeve that were extraordinary. You may have talent but you clearly lack any skill or experience.'

'Unfortunately for you, I have all three,' he added as he blasted away a whole section of forest with a wide sweeping spell that sent Jack spinning through the air in his desperation to dodge. 'Your father would be so disappointed,' he gloated happily as Jack fell back to the ground and staggered up.

'Don't you dare talk about my father!' Jack yelled, firing another volley of ice bolts that were deflected back at him with a lazy flick of Black's wand.

'Now Jack, you don't blame me for your father's death, do you?' Pitch called after him as he hid among a clump of trees that were frozen solid by his own spells.

'I blame you for everything!' Jack yelled back as he flung more spells at Pitch, forced back in the open as the trees were cut down by Black's magic.

'Your father sacrificed himself to stop me, I didn't do anything,' Pitch continued calmly, speaking as if they were merely having a friendly conversation rather than a death match.

'Which was rather inconvenient really. After all, I may have wanted to get sent to Azkaban but I was hoping that when I left I could kill your father to prove my superiority. As it is I'll have to settle for second best.'

Black scythed his wand and black mist erupted from his its tip, cutting through the vegetation to Jack who only just managed to freeze it solid with an ice spell. Jack tried to retaliate but before he could Pitch flicked his wand again, hitting Jack with a hammer of black sand that sent Jack hurling through the forest.

'Have you even bothered to learn anymore of your father's spells?' Pitch taunted as he continued to force Jack back. 'My god, your father would be so ashamed of you. Even after his death you couldn't

be bothered to try and teach yourself his heritage.
Disappointing.'

Jack huddled among a few tree branches and clutched his staff tightly, knowing that in some way Black was right. He hadn't really looked through his father's book since he arrived at Hogwarts. He was about to turn and face Black again when dark shapes erupted around him and grabbed him in sandy clutches.

He was forced to the ground and held in position at Black's feet who stared balefully down at him.

'Sorry Jack I got bored of waiting for you to come out. Do you like my Nightmares? I was always fascinated by the dementors, so powerful with their own unique abilities but so weak in others. I needed better for my plans so I decided to create a spell based from their magic but that meant either tracking down the survivors, hiding at the edges of the Earth like the weak vermin they are, or I could allow myself to be captured and study what they left behind in Azkaban. The Nightmares are the result and they are such an improvement; they grow stronger the closer they get to fear, they're immune to the patronus and, although they're vulnerable to other spells, they're unending as they'll keep coming back as long as there is a source of fear to feed on and, of course, they are loyal to me alone.'

Pitch walked around Jack as he continued his monologue while Jack struggled against the Nightmares pinning him down but without result, they were too strong.

'So you see Jack, while I am grateful for your father's assistance in the creation of my Nightmares,' Pitch rambled on as he stood in front of Jack again who was raised onto his knees to face the dark wizard, 'I can't really allow his actions against me to go unpunished and as he's dead I'll have to settle with getting revenge on you,'

With a swift swiping movement Black swung his wand round in an arc, using a very simple cutting spell. Jack felt the spell as it cut into his throat and blood began to gush down from the wound. He gasped and fell back, released by the Nightmares so that Black could watch his last dying moments unhindered.

Jack crawled away from the wizard, knowing it was pointless. His throat had been cut and there was nothing he could do to save himself, Black had killed him. He gasped for air and felt some enter his lungs as he kept crawling but sputtered and coughed at the effort, he could still see Black sitting and watching him but the world was going blurry and fading to a colourless grey.

'Jack!' A voice cried out to him, he thought he'd imagined it until Pitch's head snapped round to follow the noise. Suddenly from the trees Merida and Rapunzel burst out, firing spells simultaneously at Black who deflected them in irritation and raised his wand for a counter curse.

A screeching sound began above them and Pitch looked up just in time to dodge a blast of fire as Hiccup and Toothless soared over him. Pitch yelled angrily and sent spells against the dragon which earthed themselves harmlessly along his scales. Screaming in rage he ordered the Nightmares to chase after the dragon, which were quickly dealt

with by a combined attack from Toothless and Hiccup. They had trained for hours with Gobber during their detentions to develop the first dragon/human combo spells and they were clearly very effective as Nightmares fell to the searing hot flames Toothless and Hiccup threw at them. While Pitch was distracted by the swift rider Merida and Rapunzel hurried towards the prone Jack.

'Oh God, look at his neck!' Merida yelled in panic, 'Can ye do somethin'?''

'I don't know any spells for this kind of wound,' Rapunzel replied back, equally worried.

Pitch was furious now as the dragon continued to elude him and his Nightmares but he noticed it required a prosthetic tail fin. Grinning he sent a fire spell at the fin which burst into flame, causing rider and dragon to plummet to the ground. Hiccup landed near the others while Toothless fell further back and confronted more of the Nightmares, blasting them into oblivion with his purple flames and ripping their flanks with his fangs and claws until he was suddenly weighed down by a large press of the monsters all at once, still snapping and flaming.

'I see you've made some loyal friends Frost,' Pitch panted slightly as he straightened his robes.

'So I tell you what. You can all die together. Avada Kadavra!'

Pitch pointed his wand at the four and a green light sprang from the tip. Instinctively they all raised their wands and yelled together while Jack managed to raise his staff and whisper with them:

'Protego!'

It was a desperate attempt that they all knew would fail. None of them had mastered the shielding spell yet, Maximus had set it as a sort of joke homework before the exams, and even then, nothing could block the killing curse.

There was a horrific screaming sound as the spells met. The air where the curse and shield met was rippling and crackling between the four and Black, still emitting that tortured scream. Suddenly the rippling mass contracted into a tiny point and exploded back outwards in a single second. The shockwave was large enough to knock down all the trees around it into a flat circle and blasted the four to the ground while it sent Black hurtling into a tree, shattering it into a thousand pieces.

'Impossible!' Black spat as he raised himself back up, his face contorted by confusion and rage.

Before anything else could happen Professors Mansnoozie, Toothiana, Bunnymund, Whittler and North jumped into the circle, their wands aimed at Pitch who screamed with fury at the sight of them.

'You're going back where you belong Black,' Bunnymund snarled as he levelled a boomerang, ready to throw.

Anger and Hate crossed Black's face as he stared the teachers down

but vanished as he composed himself, smoothing down his robe as he straightened up.

'Go suck an egg rabbit,' he cursed calmly before raising his wand and sending out a volley of spells against the teachers who dodged and returned their own. The duel was vicious between them, Pitch managing to take on all five enemies at once, but barely. They danced and spun around each other, leaving the four for a moment to huddle on the ground.

Jack was lying still while the others gathered around him. Merida was trying to pump Jack's heart, although it was probably out of trying to do something rather than actually helping.

'Oh God, I think his hearts stopped!' She cried, resting her head against the boy's chest with tears streaming from her eyes.

'No he's still breathing. I'm sure of it,' Hiccup replied desperately as tears flowed down his cheeks too. He cupped Jack's face in his hand, trying to feel the life still in the white haired boy, hoping against hope that he was right.

'Merida, help me with my hair,' Rapunzel called to the redhead as she struggled to untie her braid, Pascal squeaking at her to hurry up.

'Ta hell with yer hair!'

'Merida, help me NOW!' Rapunzel ordered angrily in such a commanding tone that Merida found herself doing it automatically before she realised what was happening.

They untied the braid together and Rapunzel's hair fell between them in a large pool of silky gold. Quickly without looking at the others Rapunzel wound a length of hair twice around Jack's cut neck.

'What?' Merida asked incredulously as the golden haired girl sat back with her eyes closed in a look of determination; her hands pressed firmly on the wrap of hair, and began to sing.

Flower gleam and glow,

Let your powers shine,

Make the clock reverse,

Bring back what once was mine.

Heal what has been hurt,

Change the Fate's design,

Save what has been lost,

Bring back what once was mine.

What once was mine.

As Rapunzel sang her hair began to glow and shine with a bright

golden light like the rays of the sun. Her music echoed with a power that washed through the others who felt as if they were suddenly at the edge of a great sea which washed around them. Around Jack's neck the glow of the hair was most extreme, shifting to red, orange and purple hues that grew brighter as the song progressed. When the song was over Jack gasped, sucking in lungfuls of air and dislodging Rapunzel's hair as he sat up to feel the tender area of skin where the cut had been.

The battle behind them had stopped as the spell washed over the combatants who all watched Rapunzel with awe. As the song ended the teachers began to come to their senses but not as fast as Pitch Black.

'How fascinating,' he whispered with interest. As the teachers turned back to him he smiled at the four before waving his wand to be surrounded in a storm of Nightmares. The teachers all fired spells, knives and boomerangs at the column of black sand but when it disappeared there was no trace of Black.

'Damn!' North cursed angrily before breathing deeply and calming himself. 'Oh well, at least zhe children are safe.'

'I could have sworn I heard Black use the killing curse,' Toothiana told them all quietly.

'And I heard them use protego but they can't have blocked it. Could they?' Bunnymund replied unsurely.

'It has begun,' North told them all simply. 'We must keep them all safe now, until zhe time comes.'

The teachers nodded in tired agreement as they all watched the three hugging Jack who was in danger of suffocating as they crushed his ribs. The four were all laughing with relief and exhaustion combined.

For now at least, it was over.

* * *

><p>Phew, an entire chapter mostly about fighting. This was probably the most fun to write so far for me so I hope you enjoyed it.

And so the mystery deepens. What are the teachers talking about? What will Black do now (Something evil)? How well did the four do in their History of Magic exam (Not well)? All will be revealed at some point in the future with no specifications as to when :P

Thanks for sticking with the story and have a great weekend :)

8. The Visit

The Visit

Merida woke with a groan as her mother pulled the curtains of her bedroom aside to allow the light of the midday sun to shine directly

on her face. She'd been having such a good dream of hunting in the deep forests around her home but even as she rubbed at her eyes she could feel any detail from it slipping away.

'Ugh mum, why do ye have ta do that?' She grumbled moodily as she sat up.

Elinor smiled back at her lovingly with a touch of humour, as mothers do when they annoy their children. She had been up for many hours and was already dressed in a beautiful green gown while her long hair was tied into a single braid behind her.

'Well dear I thought ye might like to be semi-conscious when yer friends arrive,' she told Merida calmly as Merida wrestled with her sheets to find a way out. 'They'll be here in about fifteen minutes.'

'What!' Merida cried as she managed to fling aside the last sheet and leap out of bed, her drowsiness forgotten. 'That's not enough time to get ready!'

'This is why a witch should rise early,' Elinor called after her as Merida ran into her bathroom to turn on the shower.

It had been over a year since the four's encounter with Pitch. They had spent the last few days of school talking and debating over what had happened in the forest. Rapunzel explained to them her unusual powers, the magic of her hair and its healing abilities. The others pestered her with questions about why she had this gift and how it worked so she explained as best as she could but with no real understanding herself. The rest of the time they spent discussing what had happened with their protego spell. They couldn't have blocked avada kadavra; no one could, so something else must have affected it, but as hard as they tried the four could not think of anything that would weaken or stop the killing curse.

They'd asked the teachers in the hope they would have some insight but weren't given anything useful so they let it go as a fluke, a small miracle that had graced them in their time of need. They left Hogwarts and returned to spend the summer at home with their families but found themselves restless, itching for something to do and waiting for the chance to return to Hogwarts and their friends.

Now it was the summer before their third year and this time the four had prepared. Merida had invited round the other three to spend a week at the Dunbroch castle before school started and thankfully their families had consented.

Merida quickly stumbled out of the shower and dived into her closet to grab her hunting gear, a pair of trousers and a loose shirt designed for easy movement that allowed her to pull a bow's string back correctly, tossing aside the thousands of dresses her mother insistently tried to give her instead.

'Really Merida, what are yer friends goin' ta think when they see ya dressed in that?' Her mother exclaimed in exasperation as Merida tightened the belt around her waist.

'They know me mum,' was all Merida said in reply and Elinor had to concede. Anyone who knew Merida would know she hated to wear a dress

and would only wear a robe when she had no choice.

Merida rushed out of her room, followed more slowly by her mother, and charged down to the main hall of the castle, sliding along bannisters and knocking aside people in her haste. She dropped down and landed heavily on the stone floor of the hall to be greeted by her father and brothers who had been playing sword fighting in its centre.

'Up a little early aren't ye lass?' Fergus called to her as he parried the blows of two of the triplets simultaneously, 'I could've sworn it was only twelve.'

Before Merida could reply with a witty response the fireplace at the end of the hall suddenly burst into green flames. Out of the flames Jack casually stepped out, the fires closest to him burning slightly blue, who waved in greeting to the assembled family. The fires flared again and Hiccup and Rapunzel appeared one after the other behind him, Rapunzel running into Hiccup as she tried to get out of the fire, still a little wary of the flames as she'd never grown up using the floo network.

'Hey Merida, couldn't you be bothered to dress up for your guests?' Jack teased while dressed in his usual blue hoodie and jeans.

'Not on yer life,' Merida retorted happily as the Hiccup and Rapunzel ran up to join them.

'Merida,' her mother called over before anyone could say anything else, 'why don't ye introduce us.'

'I'm Elinor, Merida's mother,' she continued as she offered her hand to be shaken which the others did as they introduced themselves, although a bit more seriously than they normally would have outside of Elinor's dignified presence.

When it came for Rapunzel's turn Elinor stopped and smiled brightly. 'Oh my, what lovely hair you have,' she said as Rapunzel smiled back unsurely, 'it must take a lot of time ta comb.'

'Uh not really,' Rapunzel answered while Pascal rolled his eyes at the response, it took Rapunzel hours every morning to brush her hair and he'd normally be woken up by her as she went into the common room to do it.

'I try to comb Merida's hair ye know but it's just so tangled and messy and I need a pair of shears ta cut it whenever she lets me, which is not often by the way,' Elinor continued conversationally.

'Mum!' Merida hissed angrily as the boys smirked behind her.

Suddenly Fergus appeared behind Hiccup who nearly jumped a foot in the air in surprise as the man loomed over him. 'Well, what have we got here?' Fergus asked as he looked down at the trembling Hiccup.

'Uhâ€¦hi,' Hiccup said, nervously waving as Fergus grinned down at him.

'Would ya look at thatâ€|we match!' Fergus cheered happily as he gestured at their artificial legs, his made of wood and Hiccup's of metal.

'How'd ye get it lad, I got mine fightin' off the demon-bear Mordu. Bit it clean off in one bite that monster did,' Fergus continued as he pulled Hiccup closer conspiratorially although everyone in the room could hear him.

'I, uh, got it when I killed a Red Death dragon,' Hiccup replied as the man listened intently, 'it sort of exploded when my dragon Toothless shot fire in its mouth.'

'Ha! Ye must be a Haddock, I met yer father once when we were young lads and only his son could do somethin' like that at yer age,' Fergus continued, clapping Hiccup on the back and sending him flying into the ground.

Merida was watching this with growing amusement as Hiccup was regaled by Fergus with his most horrific stories and grew paler with each tale. She heard her father begin talking about the time his hunting party had encountered a chimera and decided to rescue the poor boy before he threw up.

'Hey dad, do ye mind if I take Hiccup and the others out now?' she asked sweetly as she pulled Hiccup away by the arm towards Rapunzel.

'Oh but I was just gettin' ta the best part. Ye see, it spat poison at the man on my right and his skin began taâ€|' Fergus continued hurriedly before being interrupted by Elinor.

'I think it's a great idea Merida, why not take some food with ye for lunch.'

'Alright,' Merida called back as she dragged Jack away from the triplets who he'd been feeding ideas on how to best to prank Maudie the maid. She took the four down to the kitchens where they grabbed a couple of bites of food to eat and then guided them out onto the flying grounds of the castle, passing across the castle grounds to do so.

'Wow Merida, how big is your house?' Rapunzel asked incredulously as he looked over the small houses that were dotted around the much larger castle.

'It used ta only be a small fort where the Dunbroch clan lived,' Merida told them as they looked out over the small crowds that moved below them. 'But when my ancestors united the magic clans of the highlands it was rebuilt and turned into the main stronghold of the Dunbroch kings.'

'Is that muscle I see Hiccup?' Jack asked, not paying attention as Merida carried on, squeezing Hiccup's arm while he swung his staff onto his shoulder with the other hand, the crook hanging over Hiccup's head.

'What? Iâ€|uhâ€|I don'tâ€|' Hiccup stammered, blushing crimson as Jack didn't let go. It was true, the girls noticed, Hiccup was no

longer quite as skinny as he had once been and filled out his shirt a lot more than he had as a first year, although that didn't say much as small tree branches could've filled his shirt out more back then.

'Jack stop seducin' Hiccup, were here,' Merida called back to them, causing Jack to let go of Hiccup's arm and stick his tongue out at her which allowed Hiccup to lose some of the colour from his cheeks and start breathing again.

They'd arrived at the flying pitch, a long court where three hoops stood on each end and to the side a small building made from red brick which contrasted to the older grey stones that formed most of the castle. Merida ushered them over to the building and opened the door to reveal the largest supply of quidditch equipment the three had ever seen. Walls were lined with riding gear, trophies and old brooms while a large trunk was left on one side, containing the quidditch balls.

Merida hurried over and tossed the three a broom each before disappearing into a side room and returning with a broom of her own. Unlike theirs Merida's broom was clearly new and well looked after, it was made from blackened wood with metal foot grips near the well-trimmed brush and along the side in glowing red and yellow letters ran the word Cinderbolt.

'Is that what I think it is?' Jack asked, looking reverently at the wooden beauty while Hiccup and Rapunzel looked at each other in confusion.

'What's going on?' Rapunzel asked as she looked between Merida and Jack.

'It's a cinderbolt broom that dad bought me,' Merida explained, 'So fast it keeps goin' after the firebolt burns out â€" or at least that's what the makers say and I've got ta agree.'

'This is so cool Merida, there's no way they won't let you on the team now,' Jack said excitedly. They both knew that spots had opened up on the Gryffindor and Slytherin quidditch teams this year and although their houses still treated them like shit they were damned if they weren't going to try out for the teams.

'Speaking of which, you'll need a broom yourself,' Merida said, grinning at him.

'Yeah, I'm going to have to sell a few things to afford one though, even with my savings,' Jack replied distantly as he looked over Merida's broom, not really listening as he examined the handle.

'Well ye could always use that broom,' Merida told him, indicating the broom he held.

'Thanks Merida but you know how old brooms can beâ€|' Jack started before stopping as he took in the broom Merida had handed him. He'd been wrong to think it was an old one like the two Hiccup and Rapunzel had taken, instead it seemed almost as new as Merida's with a smooth varnished surface. He turned it over and saw the silver inscription on the side â€" Nimbus 3000 â€" the perfect match for

Merida's cinderbolt in terms of speed and design.

'Wha'â€| Merida I can't take this, it must have cost a fortune,' he exclaimed while he tried to hand it back to the grinning redhead who pushed it back towards him.

'Which is why we all chipped in to get it for you,' Hiccup explained behind him, causing Jack to turn to see two identical grinning faces beaming back at him.

'It's your early Christmas present,' Rapunzel explained as he continued to stare at them in disbelief.

'I...I don't know what to say,' he said as they all watched him, 'This is the best present I've ever had.'

'Well it wouldn't be much fun fer me if the competition was too slow ta keep up,' Merida laughed at him. 'Come on then, let's go give them a test run,' she continued excitedly as she ran out onto the pitch.

The others followed her and soon they were all rising into the air, a little shakily in Rapunzel and Hiccup's case who were riding older brooms whose magic had weakened. Jack and Merida flew up to match each other's height while the other two struggled to follow. Jack could already feel the speed in his new broom as they rose, the way it responded to his grip and moved so smoothly showed just how well-crafted the broom was.

'There's a nice spot in the forest we could go to,' Merida yelled over to the others, pointing to a spot somewhere ahead of them, 'let's go there fer lunch.'

'Race ya!' Jack yelled back before leaning into his broom and urging to where Merida had pointed.

Immediately the Nimbus sped forward, accelerating at an incredible speed, the landscape began to move in a blur around him and still he went faster. He looked to his side for a moment and saw Merida was keeping pace easily with her broom, and was gaining ground. Soon they were both struggling to gain any advantage in the race, always getting a few metres ahead of the other only to be outdistanced a second later.

Rapunzel and Hiccup lingered behind on their slower brooms, carrying the lunch between them, and watched with amusement at the other two speeding away. Hiccup was clearly uncomfortable on his broom, at least in comparison to Rapunzel who was riding her broom quite gracefully considering it kept stuttering in the air.

'It's not as fun as flying a dragon,' Hiccup told her when asked, squirming into a better position, 'I've just got really used to using a saddle is all.'

'You should have brought Toothless,' she called over to him.

'He and I could outrace those two for sure,' Hiccup said wistfully, 'but I decided to leave him in Berk to keep dad company, he didn't really like the look of the floo network.'

They both saw Merida and Jack dive into the trees of the forest and presumed they'd arrived at the place Merida had told them about. Slowly the two flew after them and eventually arrived above a small clearing where Jack and Merida had already landed and were clearly arguing with one another.

As they landed Hiccup and Rapunzel could hear that they were arguing about who had won and smiled at each other as they began to unpack the food. The area they stood in was an almost perfect circle devoid of trees on a slight rise to the surroundings. It had clearly once been of some significance to a pagan religion as a stone circle outlined the natural one, each menhir was carved with an intricate array of symbols that ran across the entire surface of each stone.

'I won, I got here before you!'

'Like hell ye did, I was ahead of ye the whole flight!'

'I didn't even know where the finish line was and I still did better.'

'Oh please, I saw a _butterfly_ outpace ya at one point.'

'How could you have seen that unless you were behind me genius?'

'Do either of you want some food?' Hiccup called out to them.

'Not now Hiccup!' The two yelled back simultaneously before stopping and realising what he'd said.

They turned together and saw Hiccup and Rapunzel already sitting and eating, the two feeding Pascal different fruits and laughing as the chameleon changed to the colour of whatever he'd eaten.

'You started without us?' Jack asked in a fake hurt tone as he sat down next to Hiccup while Merida sat on the other side of him, their argument momentarily forgotten. 'So what are we having?'

* * *

><p>It was an hour later and the four were all sitting or lying around in the clearing, digesting the meal happily. Jack had fallen asleep with his head resting in his hands, breathing deeply and slowly. Hiccup was drawing in his sketchpad with a piece of charcoal, resting his back against a menhir, oblivious to the outside world while he focused on his work.<p>

Merida and Rapunzel were talking to each other, sitting cross legged, and were watching Hiccup with interest. It seemed to them that his eyes kept straying to the sleeping figure of Jack before returning to his sketch.

'Jack was right, the lad's definitely filled out a bit more,' Merida mused as she looked over the slightly less thin figure that was Hiccup.

'Did you see how he reacted when Jack mentioned it?' Rapunzel asked conspiratorially.

'Oh yeah but he's always been a little shy when it comes ta himself. It might not mean _anythin_', ' Merida replied before smirking at the look on Rapunzel's face, 'but _if_ we're right then I bet they'll be the last ta figure it out.'

'Agreed,' Rapunzel giggled, 'Hey, what's that?'

She pointed towards the treeline between two menhirs where the shadows of the forest just began to appear and there, in the shadow of a tree, a blue fiery light glowed. Merida sat up to look and stiffened at the sight of the thing.

'It's a wisp,' she breathed excitedly, 'my mum says that they lead you ta yer fate.'

As they watched, the wisp vanished and was replaced by another several feet above it, or maybe it was the same one, the two couldn't tell as it looked exactly the same. The wisps repeated themselves twice more, first starting at ground level and disappearing for another to appear higher up.

'Our fate is in the sky?' Rapunzel tried to translate. 'Maybe it's saying your fate is to be a quidditch player, that's some good news huh?' She joked, nudging Merida as she did.

Merida remained quiet and Rapunzel could almost feel the girl's body go rigid as she touched her. Merida hadn't been looking up like Rapunzel but was instead staring straight ahead into the trees of the forests. Rapunzel strained her eyes to see into the gloom but couldn't spot anything to provoke such a reaction in Merida. Her mind began to flash back to a year ago in the Forbidden Forest and the sight of Pitch Black standing over Jack, surrounded in darkness with his Nightmare sentries at his side.

'What is it Merida,' she asked in a worried tone.

Before Merida could answer a patch of forest split away from the landscape and hurtled through the tree line and into the clearing in one great crashing leap with a roar that shook the clearing.

'Mordu,' Merida said simply, her voice tinged with fear.

It was a bear, the biggest animal Rapunzel had ever seen, large enough to stand at the same height as the girls on all fours with paws the size of their heads. Its flanks were scarred and pierced with arrows and spears from previous opponents while its head was mainly bald with patches of fur clinging to the sides of its jaws, the bare black skin shining from the light of the sun. Its large mouth hung open where the lower lip flapped down to reveal a set of razor sharp teeth that would rip through them in seconds.

Without hesitating the bear charged them, massive muscles flowing along its shoulders like tectonic plates crashing together. The girls screamed and flung themselves out of its way just in time. They both fumbled in their pockets for their wands and drew them, their hands trembling at the thought of how useless these small sticks must appear to such a large monster.

As Mordu turned they both flung spells at it which hit its side

square on. The bear roared and shook its flanks like a dog shaking off water before charging them again and this time they weren't going to be fast enough to dodge.

'Incendir!' Hiccup cried and tongues of flame blasted around Mordu who roared defiance at this new enemy and began to bite and rip at the fire around it. It seemed to work too as the fire began to die away as it was torn apart by the bear like an animal. When the fires died out Mordu turned towards Hiccup and swiped him down with one swing, before Hiccup could right himself the bear bit down on his artificial leg and flung him with enough force to knock Hiccup back into the menhir he'd been resting on where he lay still.

He just shakes of magic like it's nothing, Merida thought desperately. _What are we supposed to do?_

'Hiccup!' Jack called out as he scrambled up from where he'd been resting, finally woken by the commotion. He prepared a spell in his mind but realised he'd left his staff back in the quidditch shed when they'd flown off. _Stupid, stupid, _he told himself angrily as he tried to find a way of getting round the bear to help Hiccup.

Mordu began too lumber forward towards Hiccup to finish the boy off but was distracted by the spells fired by Rapunzel and Merida, bouncing off its flank like rain. Enraged and reminded of his original target, Mordu turned and began to advance back towards the girls giving Jack an opportunity to run to Hiccup and wake him up.

Merida and Rapunzel were being pushed back by Mordu who shook off any spell they fired at him as if they were flies. Suddenly with a great turn of speed the bear ran forward, knocking Rapunzel aside with a lazy back hand of its paw. It advanced to Merida who was still desperately firing spells at the monster, but to no avail, and with one swipe of its paw she was knocked to the ground and winded.

As she gasped for breath Mordu was on her, pressing down her body with a single paw and looking straight down at her, its muzzle mere inches away from her face. She smelled the foul stench on its breath and began to feel tears fall down her face as she looked into Mordu's mouth and realised how easily the bear would kill her, that Mordu could close his mouth around her head and never stop until it cracked like an egg.

'**Aw, poor little Merida,**' a voice said mockingly and it only took Merida a few seconds to realise it had come from the _bear_. His mouth hadn't moved to do so but a voice was coming from him nonetheless, a voice that sounded like a boulder grinding across a mountainside.

'Ye can talk?' Merida gasped in horror at the realisation.

'**Yes. Mummy and daddy never told their little girl the whole truth about the Demon-Bear did they?' **Mordu jeered cruelly as he added pressure to her chest, slowly crushing the air from her body with ease. **'You know, when I first met you, you were crying. When you were a baby you never stopped bawling like a spoiled brat and when we met again the day I crippled your father you were just the same stupid little baby as you were then, but daddy isn't here to save you **_**this time.**_**'

Mordu opened his mouth wide to reveal his fangs in their full glory and descended to bite into Merida's head whole. Merida felt the last drops of tears brush down across her cheek in one final caress as the fangs came towards her, the last two things she would ever feel and see.

That was about when the tree hit Mordu and knocked the bear off Merida before he had a chance to bite, sending him tumbling out of the stone circle and back into the forest. It wasn't just part of a tree but a whole tree that had been ripped from the ground, earth still clinging to its roots, and it hit Mordu in one mighty swing. The bear roared; rearing on his hind legs to stand at his full height he brought down his front paws to smash the tree apart.

Merida felt herself being picked up by two sets of hands and looked back to see Jack and Hiccup each pulling her up by an arm and dragging her towards the brooms they'd left stacked against a menhir. She looked around for Rapunzel and saw her with her wand raised to direct the last fragments of the tree into Mordu's eyes. Merida knew immediately that it was her that had thrown the tree, only Rapunzel's wingardium leviosa spell was strong enough to rip an oak out of the earth and throw it. The bear roared in challenge to Rapunzel and began to run forward to pummel her into the ground.

Quickly Rapunzel flicked her wand and yelled out a series of spells that caused giant roots to erupt from the ground beneath Mordu before he could reach the first menhir, tangling with his legs, his chest and his head, trying to pull him down towards the ground with them. Mordu roared in anger and began to bite and cut at the roots, pulling himself free even as Rapunzel and Pascal grabbed their broom and the four zoomed upwards into the air and out of Mordu's reach, his roars of anger following them as they skimmed over the treeline.

'Those wisps were trying to tell us to get away,' she said to the trembling Pascal as the last roars faded away. 'There was no way we could have survived a fight with that thing.'

Jack and Hiccup stayed close to Merida's sides in case she fell from her broom. She was pale and shivering from the shock of escaping death by an inch, something that Jack knew all too well. Suddenly she leaned over the side of her broom and retched; losing the lunch she'd eaten only a few minutes ago.

'We need to warn my dad,' she croaked as she sat back up, colour returning to her face as she regained her usual strength and composure.

* * *

><p>It was a week later and the first of September had arrived. The four had piled into the train and had found a place to sit together. As it turned out the last week of the holiday hadn't been as fun as they'd hoped, on hearing that Mordu had returned Fergus had ordered that no one step into the forest and had sent Jack, Hiccup and Rapunzel home for their own safety, leaving them all alone again until today.<p>

Merida had asked her parents about what they knew of Mordu but they didn't say anything they hadn't told her already.

'Look, I heard him talk and I want to know why!' She had eventually yelled in frustration.

'People hear strange things when they're in danger Merida,' her mother had tried to reason, 'you just thought you heard Mordu speak but he wasn't really.'

Merida believed this about as much as she believed Jack when he had told her he'd killed a troll at the age of five. It was the way Elinor and Fergus had looked at each other, with worry and something that looked a lot like dread. Did they really think she didn't notice or that she wouldn't believe the testimony of her own ears?

That night she sent Angus out with a letter that read " _Rapunzel, _I need to find out more about Mordu but they won't tell me anything at home. You're the best at researching stuff and you know the library better than anyone so will you please help me find something at Hogwarts? Merida._

Two days passed by and then Angus returned with a reply " _Of course I'll help but don't expect too much, I've read a lot of bestiaries and I've never seen a reference to a demon-bear before so I'm not sure how much the library can offer. See you soon, Rapunzel._

Now Merida sat back as the train slowed and looked out the windows towards the dark towers of Hogwarts that were beginning to appear above the trees. Mordu had known her name; he'd said he knew her as a baby. He must have been closer to her family than her parents were letting on and they weren't saying how or why. Merida was being kept in the dark and she wanted to know why, she was going to get answers and nothing would stop her.

* * *

><p>I know I should have said this sooner but thank you all for the positive reviews for this fic, they're really encouraging and I'm so glad for them :)

In case any of you were wondering, menhir is just another word for standing stone which just sounds more ancient and mystical to me so I put it in :P

Also, yay, quidditch chapters soon and new third year classes to explore. What do you guys think the four have chosen?

Thank you all again and have a great week :)

**Edit: Woops I forgot to mention my inspiration for the chapter's Hijack scene came from Fluffy-fuzzy-ears artwork 'Big Four'(just imagine Rapunzel with the long hair) **

9. The Try-outs

The Try-outs

The four sat at their usual small table in the kitchens as the

house-elves ran around them, carrying plates and dishes to be set for the Sunday morning breakfast that would begin upstairs at any moment.

'You're all in rather early today,' Grindl squeaked as he ran past, his arms laden with a plate loaded with a pile of bacon that towered over his head.

'Merida and I have quidditch try-outs today,' Jack yelled after him, nodding towards the two brooms leaning on the table.

'Jack's got his first thing this morning and then it's Gryffindor before lunch,' Merida clarified as the elf raced back to fetch more forks.

'And we're here to support them,' Hiccup added while Rapunzel nodded, her mouth currently full.

'How is that going to work, if you don't mind my asking?' a second, female elf called Elise asked as she passed them. 'After all you are from different houses.'

Elise was Grindl's wife, or at least they were the closest thing to married that house-elves got. The ceremony had been set in the four's second year and both had invited the four which meant that they had been the first humans to see a house-elf wedding for over fifty years. It had been a short ceremony where Merida had NOT CRIED, followed by a moderate feast cooked by the bride and groom themselves.

'Rapunzel and I are going to wear our normal house colours but she's painting red and gold stripes on her cheeks for Merida and I'm painting mine green and silver for Jack,' Hiccup told her, having to swivel in his seat awkwardly to keep Elise in view as she passed.

'That way they both get a supporter and we can still cheer for our own houses at the same time,' Rapunzel added as she twirled her blue and bronze Ravenclaw scarf in her fingers.

The kitchens began to settle down then as the food and drinks vanished from the tables and reappeared above, giving the elves some rest time before their next duties. Grindl and Elise sat at the table and asked if they might eat with the four.

'Grindl, it's been two years, ye don't have to ask our permission ta eat with us,' Merida groaned in exasperation. House-elves may have gained better rights but they hadn't fully mastered the idea of equality yet.

'How are your new lessons?' Grindl asked after Merida was forced to give permission to let them sit. 'You were all very excited about them yesterday.'

'Arithmancy was fantastic,' Rapunzel replies excitedly, 'it's _so_ interesting, it's all about using magical and mathematical formula to predict the future. I prefer it to Divination although Merida seemed to hate it more.'

'Ha! Damn right. That crack pot Trelawney told me I was goin' ta die

but I didn't believe her for a minute.'

'Yes you did, you only stopped shivering after Toothiana told you Trelawney said it to a student every year,' Hiccup reminded her helpfully.

'How would you know Haddock? Ye don't even take Divination!'

'Trelawney kept looking at me funnily,' Rapunzel mused, 'Do you remember what she was like when she saw me Merida? She would keep looking over at me and she got really excited over when I saw something in the tea leaves.'

'She's crazy,' was all Merida could give in answer. 'And Ancient Runes isn't any easier; I have to learn to translate the damn things by readin' all these musty old books.'

Merida wasn't sure why she'd chosen Study of Ancient Runes in the first place, she only chose Divination because it had seemed easy at the time but it was as if she had been drawn to Ancient Runes like a moth to flame.

'I told her it was a bad choice,' Jack told the elves, 'She should have come to Care for Magical Creatures with me and Hiccup, although Hiccup was a total show off.'

'I just know a lot about magical creatures is all,' Hiccup protested, 'After all, I was apprenticed to the teacher for most of my life.'

'He was totally showing off,' Jack whispered to Rapunzel and Pascal who both giggled at the look of indignation on Hiccup's face.

'Shouldn't we get going anyway,' Hiccup huffed in annoyance as Merida joined in with the laughter.

'Aye, Hiccup's right you're gonna be late Jack,' Merida agreed, still smirking slightly.

'Good luck at the try-outs,' Grindl and Elise called after them they left.

'Thanks, and thanks for the food as usual,' Jack called back as the painting closed off the kitchen entrance.

The four hurried down the corridor and back up the stairs that would lead to the exit to the courtyard. They ran out into the morning sunlight, probably some of the last sun they'd see as autumn and winter took hold. They began to head down to the quidditch pitch until Jack sprang into the air in his excitement and whipped up the winds to propel him faster towards the pitch, forcing the others to run after him. It was because of this that he ended up arriving five minutes early for the start of the try-outs anyway and had to wait for the others to catch up, panting as they did.

'Come on guys, hurry up it's going to start at any minute,' he urged as the three caught their breath, leaning on the wall or resting their hands on their knees.

'Go on without us Jack, we have to watch from the stands anyway,' Rapunzel returned, pushing him towards the entrance to the pitch.

Jack gave them all one final look as they hurried up the stairs of one of the raised stands to get good spots before turning and heading out onto the pitch. There were a few applicants already ahead of him and they were all lining up in front of the current Slytherin quidditch captain James Turner. He took his place among the rest of the applicants, holding tightly on to his new Nimbus 3000 in eagerness for flight.

'Well, well, well. If it isn't Jack Frost,' said a voice Jack recognized immediately.

'Mulcaster, I thought I smelled something rotten,' Jack replied jovially to the fourth year who was leering down at him.

'You're not honestly going to try out for this are you?' Mulcaster sneered, 'You need to have some actual talent at flying to even have a chance at being accepted.'

'And yet you're still here,' Jack replied calmly, causing some of the other applicants to chuckle hesitantly until Mulcaster gave them a silencing look.

'Make jokes while you can Frost, there's no way they're going to let a muggle-lover on the team,' Mulcaster taunted, making Jack's fist clench just a little tighter around his broom.

Before he had a chance to reply the last applicant arrived and the try-outs began. James ticked off the last name from the applicant list and stepped forward to address the nine students standing before him.

'For those of you who don't know, I'm James Turner the team captain,' he began, walking back and forth in front of the students. 'We've got an opening for a seeker and a chaser this year so we're going to start off with some routine passes to warm you up for the tougher stuff.'

He and the nine, as well as the two chasers already part of the team who were helping out, rose into the air. One of the team's beaters, Thomas Carrington, opened the chest that contained the quidditch balls and tossed up two quaffles to the chasers. The aim of the first exercise was to catch the ball the chaser threw to you and throw it back, easier said than done as the chasers made their tosses more difficult with each round eventually forcing applicants to dive and swerve to catch the ball before it hit the ground.

Several applicants dropped their quaffle as the exercise grew steadily harder but Jack caught all of his, diving, swooping and in one case spinning in a loop before throwing the quaffle back at the chaser. Mulcaster was doing well too, he hadn't dropped any balls yet either and the two were soon the only two able to keep up with the chasers who continuously added extra velocity and spin to each throw. Eventually James stopped the exercise when he'd seen enough before either Mulcaster or Jack could drop a single ball which made Jack grit his teeth as he'd hoped to beat Mulcaster at the first

opportunity he had.

After that the applicants had to fly through different sized hoops that magically raised themselves to fly above the pitch, some wide enough to let three in at a time and some so small Jack could barely fit through them as he flew. Finally, their last test was to catch small practice snitches that James and the chasers threw erratically around the field. None of the applicants could catch one except Jack and Mulcaster. Jack had caught three of the small orbs and could see James throw the last one of the lot high into the air.

He lifted the head of his broom upwards and zoomed after it, the air roaring in his ears as he accelerated. Mulcaster flashed in front of him suddenly and he was forced to pull back to prevent a crash. He scowled angrily and urged his broom to go faster as Mulcaster gained on the small orb.

Suddenly he felt it, a small but significant change in the air currents that signalled the winds were going to change. He'd grown so used to controlling the winds to fly that he had begun to learn to read the air currents subconsciously and right now they were telling him that the wind was going to change course at any moment. He smiled and let Mulcaster pull ahead, hearing the cheer of triumph from the boy who believed he was victorious as he reached out to grab his prize. The winds changed right then, blowing in from the west and causing the ball to slip away from Mulcaster's fingers. It began to fall back to the ground away from Mulcaster, who was desperately trying to turn his broom around in time to fly after it, and right towards Jack. He met the ball coming up as it fell and caught it in one hand, raising it up in victory he heard the cheers below him from the others who were all waving or clapping their hands in praise.

He descended ahead of the cursing Mulcaster and handed his four balls to James, who nodded approvingly and joined the rest of the applicants who were watching him with a mixture of the usual disdain and an admiration that they probably hoped he wouldn't see. Mulcaster joined them a second later, scowling at Jack as James placed his three practice snitches back in their pouch.

'Good work all of you,' James told them happily, 'I'm going to spend a few minutes discussing my choices with the rest of the team and then I'll tell you the final decision.'

At that he went into a huddle with the rest of the quidditch team and all of the members began to talk animatedly at once while the applicants began to mutter quiet encouragement to each other.

'They're going to make me seeker for sure,' Mulcaster boasted at Jack who rolled his eyes in response.

He looked over at the stands and saw the others standing at the edge of one waving down and giving him thumbs up in encouragement. He smiled and waved back happily in response as the Slytherin team broke apart and James walked back to the applicants.

'It's settled then,' he announced cheerily, 'for the chaser we've decided Ted Mulcaster and the seeker will be Jack Frost.'

'What!' Mulcaster yelled in anger as Jack punched the air in joy at

the news, not only was he seeker but in addition Mulcaster wasn't going to be, which just made the appointment that much sweeter.

'For those of you who didn't make it, please apply to act as subs for our team if you want,' James continued, speaking to the rest of the applicants whose faces shared similar looks of disappointment which did lighten at the unspoken compliment that James still thought they were good enough to play for the team.

'Now you two can join us,' James told Jack and the dumbstruck Mulcaster as the others left, 'we're going to stay on to watch the Gryffindor try-outs. It's always good to get a look at the enemy's new recruits.'

He led them to one side of the pitch that acted as the entrance to the Slytherin changing rooms as well as an area to watch the match with wooden seats lining the walls that would be protected from most of the wind. He sat Jack and Mulcaster down and introduced them to the rest of the team who waved and said hello before turning to watch the Gryffindor team stroll onto the field, followed by their own applicants, Merida among them.

She looked around her at the other applicants who either ignored her or gave her the usual look of general dislike that the house seemed to have reserved specially for her and the others. After five minutes of preparation the Gryffindor captain walked over and addressed them like James had the Slytherins. Her name was Alice Chang, a seventh year, who looked each of the applicants over appraisingly as if to judge their skill from the way they stood alone.

Eventually, however, she smiled and thanked them all for coming in a kindly but business-like tone. From what Merida had heard while Chang was a fun person to hang out with she took the game very seriously and would work her team hard every training session to ready them for a match. Merida remembered watching some of the team coming in from a practice session that had been booked during a hail storm, soaked in water, sweat and mud, so exhausted they barely had the energy to crawl through the entrance way.

'We've got three openings this year for a keeper, chaser and beater. Could you all organise yourselves into two groups, one for chasers and keepers over here and the other for beaters over there,' she indicated two separate spots and there was a short scramble as everyone except Merida went to the chaser spot.

'What? Only one beater applicant?' Alice asked in surprise before shrugging and saying jokingly to Merida, 'Oh well, we'll just have to hope you're good.'

'You can go and work with our other beater and he'll test if you right for the job,' she added, pointing to another team member before returning to the chaser and keeper applicants.

Slightly miffed, Merida walked over to the guy that Alice had pointed out, a fourth year that she had seen around but never spoken too before. He was a tall, lanky boy with red hair like Merida, except his was closer to orange than her crimson tangles. He smiled at her as she approached and shook her hand in mock professional enthusiasm when she got close enough.

'Fred Weasley,' he said by way of introduction.

'Merida Dunbroch,'

'So you must be here because you want to smash some balls,' Fred joked cheerily as the group behind her began to mount their brooms.

Merida tried and failed to stifle a snort which made Fred smile even more. He took her over to the side of the pitch while the rest of the applicants were flying around one of the goal posts, performing catches and scores.

'Aren't you the girl who hangs out with the Slytherin and those other two all the time?' He asked with interest as he stopped and began to undo the latches of the trunk.

'Yeah, what of it?' Merida asked a little angrily.

'I'm a fan of your work,' he told her, smiling. 'You guys are pretty inventive when it comes to practical jokes.'

'We don't do it all the time,' Merida replied defensively, 'just when someone deserves it.'

Fred laughed at that as he opened the trunk and revealed the two bludgers straining at the straps that kept them tightly imprisoned.

'How do you feel at giving these bad boys a try?' he asked temptingly as he began to undo the straps. 'I'll release them and we can fly up and give them a good few hits, just so you can prove to me that you're worthy of joining the ranks of Alice's quidditch bitches.'

'Bring it,' Merida challenged as she grabbed a bat and leapt on her Cinderbolt to rise into the air.

With a final pull from Fred the last straps were free and a bludger soared up into the sky, soon joined by Fred who rose to meet Merida, his own bat in hand.

They could see the bludger soar around one of the goal posts and turn to barrel down towards the two, accelerating eagerly to knock them off their brooms.

'It's all yours,' Fred called to Merida as it neared.

Merida readied herself as the ball closed in on her, raising the bat in preparation. With one swing she sent the bludger flying back and through the central goal post with a loud THWACK that echoed across the pitch. Hiccup and Rapunzel cheered at the sound and pumped their fists in the air in support of Merida who was circling round to get another shot at the bludger as it returned.

'Holy hell,' Fred said, impressed.

'Did you hear that?' James said to the Slytherins watching Merida take another successful shot, 'We're going to have to keep an eye on her.'

'That'll be easy for Jack,' Mulcaster taunted from the side, 'he's friends with that Gryffindor.'

'Really? Great, maybe she'll go easy on you in a match,' James said eagerly to Jack to Mulcaster's dismay.

'Somehow I don't think so,' Jack replied as he watched Merida deliver another strong blow to the bludger as it went for her side.

After another twenty minutes of hitting the ball around Fred and Merida descended, Fred wrestling with the bludger until he managed to trap it back into its usual spot in the trunk where it vibrated angrily against the clasps.

'That was great!' he cheered happily, 'You're definitely in, no question.'

Merida whooped in joy and hugged Fred quickly before racing off to tell the others with a blushing Fred yelling after her, 'Alice will put practice times on the board in the common room, don't be late!'

'I'm in!' She cried as she neared Hiccup and Rapunzel who cheered along with her as Jack ran over from the Slytherin area.

'Don't think I'm goin' ta go easy on ye Frost,' Merida added as he arrived, making him laugh.

'I wouldn't have it any other way,' Jack said happily, 'Now who wants to go get some lunch? I'm starving.'

'It'll have to be quick, Merida and I are going to the library again today,' Rapunzel told them as they began to head back the way they'd come a few hours before.

'Wow, Merida going to the library willingly. I never thought I'd see the day,' Hiccup joked, hiding behind the others as Merida tried to punch him.

* * *

><p>By the end of the day Merida and Rapunzel hadn't found anything, their search was becoming more desperate every week as they began to run out of any book that concerned magical beasts and beings. They'd had to call it a day after Merida began to see white flashes in front of her eyes whenever she looked at a page and Rapunzel had left to spend some extra time at the hospital wing, leaving Merida to entertain herself for a while.<p>

Jack and Hiccup had gone out to see who was faster, Toothless or the Nimbus, and had spent the rest of the day racing one another outside. Merida wondered pleasantly if a race was the only reason Hiccup wanted to spend time with Jack before shaking off the thought and heading out to the courtyard for a walk.

As she stepped outside she was intercepted by Fred Weasley who called out to her from the Grand Staircase.

'Hey Fred,' she said as he caught up, 'what's up?'

'Want to see something cool?' He asked mysteriously, holding out his hand for her to take.

Merida looked him over warily for a second, unsure of where Fred was going to take her and in any case she wasn't sure if she was willing to just let him pull her along by the hand. After thinking it over for a second she shrugged and took his hand, allowing him to take her through a series of corridors and down a number of stairs until they arrived at a door marked ****Trophy Room.****

'Quidditch trophies?' Merida asked sceptically. 'I was hoping for somethin' a little cooler.'

'Trust me,' Fred laughed, 'you'll know what I mean when you see it.'

He opened the door to reveal a room stacked with glass cases of trophies and medals as well as the armoured statues that lined much of Hogwarts. Fred guided her to a case in the middle that contained a large trophy and a picture of the team that won it.

Merida looked closely and saw written along the plaque at the base of the trophy " ****Fergus Dunbroch.**** She turned to look at the moving picture propped next to it and saw her father twenty years younger. He hadn't grown his stubbly beard and moustache yet but a smattering of stubble around his cheeks suggested it soon would be a reality. He stood in the middle of his team and was pushing them playfully, clearly just victorious in his last game. Merida thought something about him looked strange until she realised he had both legs back then, the left one would only be lost later when defending her.

'I knew I'd heard the name Dunbroch before,' Fred told her enthusiastically as she stepped back to see the trophy and photo together. 'Your father was a beater too, like mine.'

'Alright, it is pretty cool,' Merida conceded as he beamed at her.

'Told you,' Fred returned proudly before looking back at the photo and asking, 'Do you know who the two in the back are? I think this is the only photo here that has more than just the team.'

Merida looked back and saw the man and woman Fred was pointing at. They were standing to the side a little as if they had been waiting for one of the team and hadn't realised they were caught in the picture. Recognising one Merida pointed to the woman and said certainly, 'That one's my mum.'

She knew it as easily as she knew the back of her own hand. She could see through twenty years of change that Elinor still held herself in the same dignified way she did today. Her face was less aged in the photo but still clearly that of her mother and her hair was shorter than it was today. Merida watched her for some time with curiosity, she'd never really thought of her mother at a young age before and it was strange to see what she had been like.

'I don't know the other one,' she continued as she tore her eyes from her mother and focused on the man. He was large, like Fergus was, with black hair and his own black stubble beginning to grow across

his face.

'What is it?' Fred asked curiously as she continued to stare at the man as if hypnotized.

'I don't know, I've never seen him before but it's like I recognise him,' Merida answered, still looking at the man who barely moved as he watched Fergus and his team horse around.

Suddenly a banging and the sound of footsteps came from the doorway making both of them start and breaking Merida out of her near trance. They looked at their watches and realised they'd stayed too long and curfew had begun as the echo of the footsteps came closer.

'Shit, it's probably Filch,' Fred hissed.

'Quickly, hide here,' Merida ordered pointing to a space between two cabinets that would just fit them and keep them out of sight from Filch as long as he didn't look too carefully around the room. They hurried and squeezed into the gap, barely breathing as the footsteps came closer and stopped at the door.

* * *

><p>Sorry this chapter took so long. The last few days have been really busy and I had a small case of writer's block but, no worries, we're back on track.

Anyway, yay, Fred the Second's appearance. I had wanted to have this character in the story because the death of the first Fred really took me by surprise so when I found out George had a son he named Fred I couldn't resist but make him a character :P

Until next time, see you guys and thanks for reading :)

10. The Book

The Book

Merida and Fred waited in the cramped space between two trophy cases as the footsteps outside grew steadily closer. They barely breathed as the steps echoed right outside the door in fear even the sound of their breath would be heard by Filch. The sound stopped in front of the door for a moment before carrying on down the corridor, the sounds of footsteps now leading away from them.

The two redheads let out a long sigh of relief as they stepped out from their small hiding spot. Before Merida could say anything, Fred darted over to the door and opened it a crack to peek out.

'What are ye doin'?' Merida hissed at him as he looked out.

'I just want to see who's walking about after curfew,' he whispered back cheerily, the idea of getting in trouble never crossing his mind.

'You're goin' ta get us caught,' Merida told him as she surreptitiously joined him at the door to see who it was.

Walking down the corridor she could see two figures, one in a large red robe edged in white and the other with a robe covered in shiny bangles from head to foot, Professors North and Trelawney. Trelawney was talking animatedly to North who was nodding with a polite interest. Fred began to tiptoe after them, ignoring Merida's silent waves of protest and tugging her to follow him.

They sneaked through the shadows of the corridor, keeping close to the walls so as not to get attention, and soon they were close enough to hear what the teachers were discussing.

'I sensed it the moment she stepped into my room,' Trelawney was saying to North.

'Is that so?' North asked in the same kindly tone that people used when talking to a senile old grandmother.

'Her gift is so strong it may well outshine my own in time,' Trelawney continued as the two turned a corner and their voices faded away.

'What do you think that was about?' Fred whispered to Merida as they stepped away from the suit of armour they'd been hiding behind.

'I don't know what that woman's talkin' about half the time,' Merida shrugged as Fred began to look for something in his robe pockets.

'It's goin' ta take us ages to sneak back to the common room without gettin' caught,' she complained as realisation dawned on her that they were several flights below the floor where the Fat Lady hung. They would certainly end up running into a teacher or worse the Bloody Baron.

'Not to worry, I have this,' Fred said as he triumphantly pulled out a piece of brown parchment from his robes.

'Explain,' Merida demanded as she stared at the blank paper. She hadn't known Fred long but she doubted that he just carried unimportant pieces of parchment around with him unless it had some other purpose.

With a flourish and a look of mock seriousness on his face Fred tapped his wand against the paper and said, 'I solemnly swear that I am up to no good.' At once ink began to run down the paper, drawing themselves into what looked like a map where small markers moved about with a name listed below them. Merida looked closely and saw two with the names Merida Dunbroch and Fred Weasley standing in a perfectly accurate drawing of the corridor they were standing in, with two other markers heading away from them named Nicholas St. North and Sybil Trelawney. At the top of the page she read, The Marauders Map mark 11, drawn by Fred and George Weasley.

'My dad made it with his brother,' Fred told her as she continued to stare, 'They stole the original from Filch's office and memorized it before passing it on. They wrote this one with any additions that the original map didn't have.'

'So you're Fred the second?'

'Yeah, he was my dad's twin brother. He died during the battle of Hogwarts,' Fred answered a small amount of real solemnity edging his voice. 'Anyway, this thing can show us any secret passages so we won't get caught.'

'Let's get goin' then,' Merida said happily as they followed the map to the end of the corridor and opened a hidden door to reveal a tight spiral staircase. Soon they had arrived at the portrait of the Fat Lady without encountering any problem on the way.

'Lily sprouts,' Merida said to the Lady as Fred hid the map back in his robe pocket.

'I hear you're our new beater, well done,' The Lady congratulated as she swung open to reveal the entrance to the corridor.

'Thanks,' Merida replied as she crawled in.

The common room was still pretty full at this time of night and large groups of people stared when they saw Fred was with the house's social outcast. Several groups began to mutter curiously to each other, still staring unabashed at the two although Fred either didn't notice or ignored them

'So, I'll see you at practice then,' Fred said to her as he headed towards one group who were sitting by the fire.

'Yeah, thanks for showin' me all that, it was fun,' Merida returned as she began to walk up to the girls dormitories.

'No problem, don't forget to look up practice times, Alice turns into a real troll if you're late,' he called after her.

'I'll do what Fred?'

'Oh, hi Alice,'

Merida chuckled as she heard Fred unsuccessfully try to explain himself to a fuming Alice before opening the door to the third year dormitory and cutting off Alice's angry reply.

* * *

><p>'No way, it's your turn to take her,' Jack complained to Hiccup as they stood waiting outside the potions classroom.<p>

'You know the rules, I won the race and I get to decide your punishment,' Hiccup laughed as Jack glared angrily at him. Jack had become increasingly frustrated during their race that no matter how fast his Nimbus moved it just couldn't outpace a nightfury at full speed. He'd eventually made a bet with Hiccup that whoever won their last race would get to decide a punishment for the other in the hopes that it would give him the incentive to win. Unfortunately it hadn't been enough, he'd got so close to outpacing Toothless but the black dragon simply flapped his wings a few more times and sped away even faster than before, so he lost the bet and now he was paying the price.

'But you can't put me with Merida, she's awful at potions,' he moaned at the unfairness of the situation.

'Hey, I had the worst of it,' Hiccup reminded him, 'It took days after that first lesson for my freckles to stop glowing.'

'Suck it up Jack, you're just going to have to deal with it,' Rapunzel told him as Pascal giggled on her shoulder.

'I am standin' right here guys,' Merida reminded them angrily as the doors opened and the class began to file in.

As usual only the front tables were left when the four walked in, forcing them to walk between lines of the usual glaring or uninterested students until they reached their cauldrons.

'Well if it isn't our new seeker,' Professor Whittler said as Jack sat resignedly next to Merida. 'Well done laddie, I expect to see that house cup on my mantelpiece this year.'

'Thanks professor, it's a real honour,' Jack said, grinning as he knew some of Mulcaster's cronies would be scowling at him from across the room for saying that.

'Well you've all done the homework for brewin' the cure for a manticore bite,' Whittler continued, addressing the whole class now.

'Some better than others,' the raven on her desk croaked as it looked at Jack, Merida and a few other students.

'So now all ye have ta do is brew it,' Whittler stated after swatting at the bird with her hand, 'chop, chop. Get on with it.'

There was the usual rush as students went to gather the necessary supplies and returned with their arms full of interesting looking roots and powders. Everyone returned to their desks and began looking through their textbooks for the recipe except for Rapunzel who had already directed Hiccup to dice several roots while she organised the first splashes of potion.

Merida set to work with a purposeful look on her face. They didn't think she could cook up a potion? Well she'd show them. If the book says tear up the mandrake root then you tear the mandrake root which she began to do with a ferocity that suggested the roots had committed a great wrong against her.

Jack had already begun to pour a few potions into the cauldron and was stirring them energetically. Merida grabbed the torn up mandrake roots and pushed Jack out the way and began to fling the roots in the liquid with one hand while she stirred it with a large metal spoon in the other.

'Merida what are you doing?' Jack asked in surprise.

'We're supposed to put in torn mandrake's roots next,' Merida explained angrily.

'Those aren't Mandrake's roots!'

The rest of what Jack was going to say was lost when a loud BANG boomed out of the cauldron and much of the contents spewed up in a

geyser of potion. When it was over Merida was standing in front of a smoking cauldron with the handle of a melted spoon still in her hand. The rest of the class were getting on with their work, the minor explosions that Merida caused every now and then had stopped being surprising after a while.

'Merida Dunbroch! That is the fifth time this term!' Whittler yelled in exasperation as Merida dropped the remains of the spoon into the cauldron. 'Just go get another spoon and whatever you've used up from the store room and start again, this time with the _right_ ingredients.'

Merida nodded and stomped angrily over to the open store room. Alright, so who cared if she wasn't any good at potions, it was a stupid subject anyway and she was doing great in Transfiguration and, thanks to their weekly extra lessons with Professor Maximus, she and Jack were top of every Defence Against the Dark Arts class.

She rifled through the supplies in the store until she found a new stirring spoon and grabbed the replacement ingredients; she turned to leave when her eye caught something. It was a small book that had been wedged between two old textbooks, almost hidden amongst the larger tomes. What had caught her eye was that the cover was decorated with drawings of bears which in itself was not particularly strange, Professor Whittler's strange obsession with making bear shaped carvings was well known. These were different to her usual work though because on closer inspection the bears didn't look like bears at all but rather the shadows of bears cast on a cave wall by a fire, twisted and gnarled into more terrible and nightmarish shapes than anything natural could look.

She pulled the book out from its place and looked at the cover, unlike the spine the cover only had the drawing of one bear shadow, much larger than the others with its claws scratching down the edge of the book as if the image was trying to cut its way out. She opened the book and read the title written in large messy letters " _The path to becoming the True King._

It looked interesting so Merida snuck it into her robes and walked back out into the classroom. In the few minutes she'd been gone Rapunzel and Hiccup had already nearly completed their final ingredients and were just preparing the potion already in the cauldron.

'How come you're so good at this Rapunzel?' Hiccup asked in amazement as Merida passed by while Rapunzel finely cut the newt legs into perfect strips. Her brow, sweating from concentration, was being mopped by Pascal with a tissue as if they were in a surgery rather than a classroom.

'Brewing potions is just like cooking,' Rapunzel told him as she tossed the leg strips into the boiling liquid which immediately turned into the expected silver colour, 'and I used to do a lot of cooking when I wasâ€|when I was younger.'

Jack meanwhile had been trying to salvage as much of their potion as he could. When he saw her coming back he smiled and asked, 'Are you alright? Whittler was kind of harsh back there.'

'Eh, I don't care,' Merida replied, sneaking the book into her bag as

she dropped the replacement ingredients on the table, 'I've just got a natural flare for explosions is all.'

'You're telling me, the ceiling got charred from that one,' Jack agreed happily as he pointed to a patch of ceiling that was indeed smouldering gently, the stones of the dungeon making plinking noises as they cooled.

'Alright so what she we put in next,' Merida said as they stopped laughing, hoping to get the lesson back on track and prove she had at least some capability to brew a potion.

'It says here we're supposed to use a cup of crushed firewort seeds,' Jack told her as he consulted the book.

'You mean these,' Merida replied as she picked up a bag.

'I don't think those are even seeds Merida,'

* * *

><p>The first quidditch match of the season was between Gryffindor and Ravenclaw this year which meant Alice Change piled as many practice sessions on the team as she could every week. She didn't care what the weather was doing and would force them all out even in the wettest storms and push them all to the brink of their skill and ability before calling it a day and sending them off.<p>

Merida and the rest of the team would return from each one hobbling on tired legs with eyes already closing in attempts at sleep which meant Merida had not yet had a chance to read the book of the True King. It waited hidden under her bed for after the match when Merida would be freed for a short time from practice and had the time to read it.

'Seriously, she's so much fun when we're just watching a game,' Fred had gasped as he and Merida supported one another up the last flight of stairs to the common room after one particularly stressful session.

'It's like she gets possessed or somethin',' Merida agreed as they staggered the last few feet together. Although she complained with the others, Merida found she was really enjoying herself playing with the team. Even though some of them still gave her dirty looks Alice would come down on anyone like a ton of bricks if she thought they would damage the team's performance by ostracising a member too much.

Eventually, of course she would have to prove herself to the more sceptical teammates and that time came on the day of the match. It had lasted for an hour and a half before Alice finally found and caught the snitch to wild cheers from the Gryffindor stadium, winning the game at 240-0. Merida and Fred had been zooming around the pitch non-stop, hitting bludgers to knock down enemy chasers and beaters, and intercepting ones hit towards their own chasers. It had been tiring work but worth it when she landed with the others and had raised Alice on their shoulders in victory as part of the team, everybody forgetting to give her dirty looks for the moment.

She saw the other three too, standing at the edge of one of the

platforms and waving small red and gold flags as well as having the same colours smeared across their cheeks as promised. They waved and cheered in front of the crowds and stood out to Merida like three small beacons of joy, making her smile and wave back.

The team had got changed in record time to hurry out and up the Grand Staircase until they reached the common room; there the Gryffindor's had already prepared a small party for them where Alice held the winning snitch in the air like a trophy. Everybody was loud and happy and all were clamouring to give congratulations to the team, some even to Merida although she still got less than the rest of the team.

Suddenly Alice stood up on a table and waved for everyone to quiet down, which they did eventually although there were always small murmurings around the room.

'I'd just like to congratulate the team for our first big win of the season,' she started, yelling to be heard by the entire room as people began to cheer loudly. 'And most of all I'd like to thank the efforts of our beaters Fred and Merida who made sure the Ravensclaws didn't score a single point!'

At that there was an even greater roar of appreciation and Merida felt someone grab her hand and lift it up like she was the winner of a boxing match. She looked around and saw Fred beside her, basking in the attention as people turned to look at them and clapped when they realised who they were. For the first time since her arrival at the school people had forgotten their dislike of Merida although she could see Susan Nix and her gang all sneering at her as usual so it wasn't too different. The cheering died down after Alice stepped off the table and the party resumed.

'That was good work out there,' Fred yelled over to her, giving a thumbs up.

'Thanks, you too,' Merida said as she looked at her watch and realised it was nearly seven. 'Damn! I've got ta go.'

'What? How come?' Fred asked disappointedly.

'I promised the others I'd meet them at seven after the match,' Merida told him as she began to head for the exit.

'Why not stay for one celebration drink,' Fred offered, holding out a glass of pumpkin juice to her, 'just for a toast.'

'Alright, just one,' Merida said as she took the glass, the others wouldn't mind her being a little late.

'I promise I won't keep you away for too long,' Fred reassured her sincerely as he took a swig of his pumpkin juice.

* * *

><p>She arrived in the kitchens just half an hour late as the school bells chimed seven-thirty, Fred had surprisingly kept his promise and almost ushered her out so she wouldn't be too late. She stepped through the painting of the fruit bowl and was greeted by Jack, Hiccup and Rapunzel, as well as all the house-elves, standing in

front of a large red and gold banner that read "Merida #1 Beater."

They all cheered when she entered and clapped their hands in congratulations as she was guided to a large stack of food that the house-elves had prepared.

'Good job Merida,' Hiccup told her happily.

'Yeah well done,' Rapunzel cheered as Pascal flashed alternately between red and gold.

'Thanks guys,' Merida told them as she and the others all began to take helpings of the food.

'James says you're the new one to watch,' Jack informed her as they all ate, some of the house-elves leaving to complete duties elsewhere in the castle while others, including Grindl and Elise, remained to share the food. 'He said with a swing like yours we're going to have to watch out for you in a match. Then Mulcaster tried to say something witty but I stopped paying attention.'

'Sorry I'm so late,' Merida apologised, feeling a little guilty now for making the others wait. 'It's just that some of my team wanted a celebration drink before I left.'

'You're making friends outside our group now?' Hiccup asked, pretending to look hurt in betrayal which made Merida laugh with relief.

'So, how was the Gryffindor party?' Rapunzel asked curiously.

'Pretty cool actually, people clapped for me and they seemed to mean it,' Merida replied, her words causing mock shock from the three.

'Wow, maybe our quidditch positions are going to lift our social status above scum,' Jack joked as the others laughed.

Merida returned to the common room three hours later, after curfew had started. It would have been earlier if she had Fred's magic map but as it was she had to take her time sneaking through the corridors until she got to the Lady's portrait.

When she got into the common room she was exhausted, the day's events had pretty much drained all her energy. Even so when she went up to the dormitory and tip-toed past the sleeping figures to her own bed she couldn't help but reach down under it and pull out the mysterious book, she'd left it for too long and now she wanted to know what it said.

She opened it to reveal the title page again "The path to becoming the True King" the words illuminated into spidery glyphs by her bedside light. She turned the page to reveal pages crammed with formulas and theories written so tightly together that the whole thing was almost black with ink with barely enough white of the page to distinguish between the words.

She didn't understand most of the equations; they looked similar to

ones that Whittler sometimes left on the board after a lesson with sixth or seventh years but far more complicated. She turned another page to reveal multiple sketches, some again of horrific shadowy bears but many more of different flowers, herbs, tinctures and other potions equipment. Whatever this book was it was clearly designed to create a powerful potion and Merida was suddenly worried that this book was more important than it looked. What if Whittler came looking for it? She'd get a detention for sure, maybe even suspension.

But then again, the damage was already done and the book had been missing for a few weeks now; she could always return the book tomorrow with Whittler being none the wiser. She read on, or at least flicked through more pages. Every page became more detailed with more drawings or equations the further in she got, clearly whatever the writer had been working towards they had been getting closer. As she flicked through Merida realised that the pages each shared one similar feature, a sentence written at the bottom right edge of each one like a chant.

She looked closely and read "The strength of ten men, the power of ten wizards". She continued to flick through the pages and stopped as she found something more interesting than the scrawled potions notes. It was more like a diary entry than anything else which read:

With the strength of ten men, no warrior could defeat you.

With the power of ten wizards, no spell could harm you.

These are the two traits a king should strive towards, that should be proof of their right to rule, not some long forgotten blood-link to the land!

This potion will be proof of my right as the True King and when it is complete, no one will stop me.

Merida shuddered as she read it; she could almost feel the malice leaking from the ink on the page. She turned to the last pages that were mainly empty except for a final few equations and ingredients, refined and perfected from their predecessors in the beginning of the book. Underneath them a last message had been written, very hastily by the look of it as if the writer had been hurrying in their excitement.

My potion is complete, years' worth of work and research finally succeeding.

With this, I shall regain my family's ancient right and ascend to the true power that I deserve.

I shall become the True King Mordu.

Merida gasped and threw the book away to the end of her bed as if it had bitten her hand. She sat, her arms wrapped around her knees, staring at the book as if it would move. In her head thoughts raged like a tempest. That was why they couldn't find a reference to Mordu in all those bestiaries from the library, because the Demon-bear Mordu had once been a human.

* * *

><p>Phew, another chapter written in less than 24 hours. It's all because I love you guys (Don't get used to it :P)

Thanks as ever for the great reviews and thanks for reading. :)

11. The Truth

****The Truth****

Hiccup shivered and huddled further into his furs as a chilling breeze blew across the grounds. It was an early spring morning and the grass had turned a pale shade of blue as the dew on their blades froze, crunching under his boots as he walked back towards the castle.

'Wish I'd kept Toothless with me,' he said to himself, remembering the feeling of Toothless' warm, dry scales as they flew through the frigid air.

He stopped as he saw another figure moving around at the side of the castle, closer to the Forbidden Forest's tree-line. He recognised the blue hoodie and shepherd's crook staff immediately, although even without these features he would have known it was Jack as only Jack could be walking around in this weather in bear feet. But what was Jack doing out so early?

Hiccup hid behind one of the courtyard walls and peeked around the side to get a good view of Jack without being spotted. He had no idea why he was hiding, he knew he could just ask Jack later today but his curiosity made him stay.

Jack was crouching at the base of his staff, looking at something Hiccup couldn't see from his angle. It had to be important as Jack spent a good five minutes, watching it intently before nodding to himself and standing up. He grabbed his staff and twirled it around a bit unconsciously as he prepared himself. When the staff reached the top of a twirl Jack quickly brought it back down and struck the earth with its base as if to stab down into the ground. Immediately an icy wind blew from the staff, the ground freezing around its tip in the usual fern patterns, while around Jack small glowing white circles began to appear and grow until they merged to form a ring around Jack who stood right in its centre.

Hiccup craned further forward so as to get a better view of what was about to happen but just then Jack gave a gasp and collapsed to one knee, the shimmering ring surrounding him fading along with the wind. Concerned, Hiccup stepped out from his hiding spot and ran over quickly to check if Jack was alright.

'Are you okay?' He asked nervously as he crouched down to look Jack in the face. The boy was panting from what looked like over-exertion but otherwise unharmed as he smiled reassuringly at Hiccup.

'Yeahâ€¦it's fine. It'll just take a little practice is all,'

'What will take practice?' Hiccup asked in confusion, stepping back as Jack got up from his kneeling position.

As he did his furred boot knocked into something that, when he looked down, turned out to be a book. It was grey with dog-eared edges and looked as if its spine had been enlarged multiple times to add space for additional pages, which in fact it had. It glittered enticingly like freshly fallen snow being hit by sunlight.

'Whoa, careful Hiccup!' Jack warned as Hiccup bent to pick up the book but too late as Hiccup's fingers closed around the edge.

They stood frozen for a second, both afraid something would happen, before Hiccup stood up slowly, holding the book at arm's length in fear of what it might do if he made any sudden moves. Jack took it from him gently and began to laugh at the serious look on Hiccup's face.

'Sorry about that. I put a winter-sealing charm on it a year ago and I've never been sure if it would hurt you guys or not,' Jack apologised to the bewildered Hiccup. 'I was just afraid you'd have to go to Madame Pomfrey and Rapunzel to cure frostbite.'

'Ohâ€¦right,' Hiccup responded, 'Waitâ€¦_what_?'

'Maybe we should go in where it's warm,' Jack suggested as he saw Hiccup shiver from another gust of wind, as ever he didn't feel the cold but he knew when it was and right now he knew Hiccup wouldn't be feeling too comfortable even in his furs.

'Don't worry, I'm not that cold,' Hiccup reassured him as they hurried back to the castle. 'I'm Berkian after all; we think anything above freezing is warm.'

Jack smirked at that until he noticed Hiccup was still holding his father's book, gently but firmly he took it from Hiccup's fingers and put it back in his bag for safe keeping. When they got in Hiccup tried to rub his hands warm, having forgotten his gloves as usual in the dormitories. Seeing this Jack tried to warm them himself, cupping Hiccup's hands in his own until Hiccup shivered more and pulled his hands away involuntarily.

'Oh sorry I forgot, I can only make you colder,' Jack apologised. 'There's a spot where you can light a fire over there,' he added helpfully, pointing at a small alcove hidden slightly in the wall.

It was definitely a small place, a sort of circular bump in the wall with a row of stone seats set around a currently empty brazier. They both sat down on the seats and Jack began to hunt for the material to start a fire.

'No need,' Hiccup told him before pointing his wand at the brazier and intoning, 'incendir.'

Immediately flames appeared in the grating and soon the small alcove was much warmer, Jack was sure he could see the walls steaming gently as the fire warmed them.

'So what's with the book?' Hiccup asked as he settled back on the

seat.

'Oh right,' Jack said, pulling out the book absentmindedly. 'It's sort of my dad's book, well my family's really,' he continued as he began to flip through the pages.

'You know I told you my family specialise in ice magic, well this is the book all my ancestors wrote in when they were coming up with new spells, most of them are only known by our family. When a wizard or witch in the family comes of age they're given the book and get taught the spells by a member of the family who's already mastered them.'

'Wow, how come you've never shown it to us before?' Hiccup asked curiously as he looked at the pages of the book, some white and fresh and others brown and ancient.

'I don't know,' Jack sighed as he continued to turn the familiar pages of the book. 'It's the last connection I've got to my dad; he left it to me after he died. He was supposed to teach me the spells himself but he died when I was eight, so all he could do was leave me the book.'

'Hey, if you don't want to talk about it that's fine,' Hiccup said, worried that he'd crossed a line.

'No it's alright,' Jack reassured him, 'I've justâ€|never really talked about it before. The thing is I didn't really pay much attention to it in the first year, I just learned the spells that looked fun. It was only after Black that I started to learn it properly; I go out in the mornings and go spell by spell now. After all, my sister's going to need me to teach her when she turns eleven.'

Hiccup began to think quickly when he saw the look on Jack's face, the same look of loss he had known after his mother died. Realising what would cheer up the conversation he took off his horned helmet and showed it to Jack whose expression changed from sorrow to confusion.

'This is all I've got left of my mum,' he told Jack with what he hoped was realistic solemnity.

'That's cool,' Jack said, 'Do Berkians usually inherit helmâ€|?'

'It's half of her breastplate,' Hiccup interrupted quickly making Jack snort uncontrollably.

'Oh God, sorry I didn't meanâ€|' Jack said hurriedly when he'd stopped, looking guilty for laughing at Hiccup's own heirloom until he realised Hiccup was laughing too.

'Don't worry, she'd make jokes about it too,' Hiccup told him as he put the helmet back on. 'What's worse is dad has the other half,' he continued, making them both laugh again.

'So what was that about me getting frostbite?' Hiccup asked when he remembered what had happened when he'd tried to pick up the book.

'Oh that,' Jack said, still laughing slightly, 'it's a charm I learned from the book that stops people I don't want grabbing it. Lucky I used it too because Mulcaster tried to steal it a month later, he had to go to the hospital wing for freeze burns.'

'Serves him right,' Hiccup laughed along.

'Looks like our time's up,' Jack stated as he looked out the window to see the sun now rising higher above the Forbidden Forest. They could hear the first people beginning to come down to the Great Hall for breakfast and knew that the day had properly begun.

'I've got to goâ€|'

'I've got toâ€|'

They both stopped to let the other finish, leaving a slightly awkward silence as they both fought to think up what to say next.

'I'll see you at breakfast,' Hiccup eventually managed as they began to wander out from the alcove and down to their common rooms.

'Yeah, and then we're off to Hogsmeade,' Jack replied, putting the book back into his bag and grabbing his staff.

'So I'll see you and the others in a minute then,' Hiccup said awkwardly as he turned into the Hufflepuff corridor.

Jack waved a goodbye and then turned to walk down into the dungeons. 'What the hell was that!' He exclaimed to himself when he was sure no one would hear him.

* * *

><p>It was still cold when the four set off to Hogsmeade two hours later. Although the sun was shining without a cloud in the sky the icy winds were still blowing and kept the temperature down to just above freezing.<p>

'Are you sure you need _all_ those clothes Rapunzel,' Hiccup asked as the town came into view.

Rapunzel's reply was too muffled to hear as much of her head was wrapped tightly in her Ravenclaw scarf. She was also wearing at least two winter robes because she was much bulkier than the others remembered. Pascal was currently wrapped in a bundle of Rapunzel's scarf on her shoulder, still shivering nonetheless.

'What was that? Did you hear that Merida?' Jack asked jokingly at the sounds coming from Rapunzel's scarf.

Merida was staring off into the distance, her eyes looking at Hogsmeade but not really seeing it. She'd been like that for a couple of days, hardly paying attention to her teachers or friends as if all of her mind was focused on something else.

'So where should we go first,' Jack asked, knowing there was no real point in waking Merida from her thoughts. She'd just go back to staring blankly into space after a few stunted sentences.

'How about Weasley's Wizard Wheezes,' Hiccup suggested as they arrived on the streets of Hogsmeade and the shop appeared before them.

'Good idea, I need to stock up on Filibuster Fireworks,' Jack said, rubbing his hands together in excitement as they entered the shop.

Inside the shop was mayhem, students from all years of Hogwarts were lining up to buy all sorts of items and more were jostling amongst the shelves, grabbing at whatever they could. Jack dived merrily into the fray, heading for the firework section and knocking people out the way with his staff, while Hiccup and Rapunzel browsed on the outskirts of the crowd and Merida stood disinterestedly by the door.

'Hey Merida,' a voice said behind her, breaking her from her thoughts.

'Oh, hi Fred,' she responded, looking around to see the beaming redhead.

'You looked a million miles away,' he told her reproachfully, 'I'm surprised you're not fighting through the crowds with your friends.'

'I'veâ€¦|had a lot to think about,' was all Merida could say in return.

Fred looked at her quizzically and then smiled before pulling her along around the outside of the crowd.

'Where are ye takin' me this time?' she yelled angrily over the din of the crowd. Without answering Fred took her through a door labelled ****Staff Only**** and closed it behind her, cutting off the sound of the crowd.

Merida looked around her, for what seemed like miles, boxes and crates of every joke item the shop sold were stacked. Employees of the shop walked through the rows, picking out items that needed restocking or ordering the crates into better positions.

'It's easier to take what you want from here,' Fred told her conversationally. 'You'll have to pay for it though, dad doesn't even give me a discount and I'm his son.'

'Your dad owns this shop?' Merida asked in wonder, finally making the connection between Fred's last name and the shop, her thoughts on the book currently hidden in her bag forgotten.

'He and his brother founded it,' Fred told her as they began to descend to the glory below them.

They spent the next fifteen minutes browsing and rummaging through the stacks of different joke objects. Eventually Merida came away with only a broom maintenance kit while Fred was weighed down by an entire assortment of joke sweets, fireworks and games. They paid for them and said their goodbyes, Fred going off with his girlfriend Ashleigh Marsh and Merida with the others.

Soon she descended back into her thoughts on the book and what to do about it. She'd thought of almost nothing for the last few weeks and still had no idea what to do about it. The Easter holidays were coming up soon and that meant she would have to return home to the highlands, and she didn't want to return there until she had all the answers.

'Can we go to the Three Broomsticks next,' she said suddenly, 'I need a butterbeer.'

The three looked at her in surprise; this was the most she had said to them all day. They shrugged their shoulders at one another and followed the red-haired girl into the pub. They ordered their butterbeers and took them into a secluded corner of the pub where they sat at a table. Without any warning Merida opened her bag and dumped Mordu's book onto the table making the three jump.

'I need to tell ye somethin',' she said, leaning forward so no one else would hear.

Her story took a surprisingly long time to tell and by the end of it the others were left with their mouths half-hanging open.

'The bear that tried to kill us?' Jack asked incredulously as Rapunzel reached over and began to pour through the book, Pascal leaning over on her shoulder to get a good look.

'Was a man,' Merida answered simply.

'This is incredible,' Rapunzel said as she read the cramped pages of the book. 'I've never read anything this complex before; he was trying all kinds of ingredients and methods to make this potion.'

'Ye can read that thing?' Merida asked, impressed as she couldn't make heads or tails of the equations.

'A little, it uses similar symbols to Arithmancy but in the context of potions instead. I can't read much of it though; some of this stuff is so complicated I think only the greatest potion masters could understand it fully.'

'What's this stuff about being the True King?' Hiccup asked in confusion, drinking the remains of his butterbeer.

'I don't know, it has somethin' ta do with my dad though,' Merida replied, 'Mordu talked about my parents as if he knew them and I'm sure they know more about him than they're tellin' me.'

'Why was this book in the potions room to begin with?' Rapunzel asked, still staring at the last page of the book as if it might tell her.

'Well it was pretty well hidden,' Merida remembered, 'No one else would've noticed it; I'm not even sure why I did.'

'Not that. Why was it hidden in the school? Surely something like this should be in the care of the Ministry for Magic not a potions storeroom.'

'Good question,' Jack said, leaning back in his chair as he thought about it.

'Do you think Whittler knows anything about it?' Hiccup asked conspiratorially.

'Uh, all this book's done is ask more questions than it answered!' Merida yelled who was quickly shushed by the others as other students turned to see what was going on.

'Something's wrong,' Rapunzel spoke up suddenly. She was holding all the pages of the book and was moving them back and forth so she could look at the inside of the cover on both sides.

'What is it?' Merida asked, hope of another clue rising in her heart.

'The back inside cover's wrong,' Rapunzel said to the general groans of the others.

'Seriously, can we focus on the mystery and not the design,' Jack said in exasperation to general agreement from the others.

'No, I mean it. The back cover has been stuck together wrong,' Rapunzel told them, showing the inside of the back which did indeed look messier than the inside of the front. 'And feel it,' she continued at the look of their uncertainty, 'there's something inside the back I'm sure of it.'

The others took hold of it as well and ran their fingers over the cover, there did seem to be a slight impression of two very small bumps hidden in the lining. They all looked at each other, knowing this might be something important or nothing at all and they all hesitated, unsure whether it would be worth it or not.

Eventually Merida couldn't stand it anymore and used the tip of her wand to rip open the lining and reveal what was hidden within. What looked like a torn piece of paper fell out from the cover and drifted onto the table. Immediately Merida realised she had been mistaken, it wasn't paper but a photograph torn in two. The images were frozen now, their spell destroyed from the prolonged damage of the tear.

Merida gasped when she saw that on the larger half were her parents, still young like in the quidditch photo. They were older than that though, Fergus' stubble was thicker and his moustache had grown larger while Elinor seemed to stand with even greater maturity than when she had waited for her future husband after his quidditch match. They were in a happy embrace and waving at the cameraman.

She looked at the other half and saw man as large as Fergus but with black hair and with a far larger beard, not stubble any longer but becoming fully-grown. She realised she recognised him, he was the man that had stood with her mother in the quidditch picture but what was he doing here?

She turned the picture of her mother and father over and saw there was writing on the back.

The engagement party of Fergus Dunbroch and Elinor McRae with the brother of the bride

The names had been written to mirror exactly where the pictures were so the last name was cut off as it was behind the picture of the man. Quickly Merida turned over his half of the photo to reveal his name.

Mordu McRae

Merida's stomach clenched violently and she was sure she would have been sick if she hadn't got a hold over herself and forced herself to breathe deeply for a few seconds. Mordu the demon-bear...her uncle.

Without thinking she grabbed the book and sprinted out of the Three Broomsticks before the others had a chance to read the back of the photos. She sprinted faster than she had ever moved before, back up to the school. She was going to end this fucking mystery once and for all.

'Merida wait!' The others called back to her as they tried to catch up but it was no use, they'd had to pay for their butterbeers hurriedly before leaving and that meant Merida had a good head start on them. Jack flung himself into the air, shepherding the winds with his crook to send him after her and soon he was closing in, gaining enough ground to stop her and get her to calm down.

Without breaking her pace Merida turned in mid-stride and pointed her wand at him, shouting 'Petrificus totalus,' before he had a chance to react. Immediately his limbs snapped together and he tumbled to the earth with a small thud. Without another look back Merida turned into the castle and vanished from sight.

Seconds later, Hiccup and Rapunzel appeared panting over the hill. Rapunzel called out a counter curse and Jack sprang back up immediately, running with the others this time as he was unwilling to take on Merida in her current state alone.

* * *

><p>In the dungeons Merida's running footsteps banged and echoed across the stone walls and soon enough she burst into the office of Professor Whittler, the door banging as it was thrown against the wall.<p>

'Miss Dunbroch, what is the meaning offâ€|!' Whittler began angrily as she stood up from her desk where she had been working on a new carving when Merida slammed Mordu's book in front of her.

'Where did ye get that?' She asked in far calmer tones, the presence of the book immediately wiping away her anger.

'From where ye hid it of course,' Merida snarled back, 'Now I want ye ta tell me why ye hid it.'

'Ye've got no right to stealâ€|'

'No one had the right ta keep the truth from me either,' Merida retorted before she could finish, looking defiantly at the potions

professor, 'I know Mordu's my uncle.'

That seemed to surprise Whittler as the old woman seemed to deflate slightly with a heavy sigh. At that moment a banging behind them alerted Merida that the others had finally caught up with her. They looked in cautiously and saw Merida standing tall against Whittler who suddenly was looking very old.

'Alright,' Whittler sighed, 'I'll tell you.'

'You three,' she snapped suddenly at the others, 'wait outside, this is private between me and the lass.'

'No, they stay,' Merida said stubbornly, 'they're the only people I trust right now.'

Whittler gave another sigh and nodded her head in approval, allowing the others to come in. They sat down at the edges of the class, near enough to give Merida support if she needed it but far enough not to interrupt. Whittler and Merida sat down last, across each other from the desk.

'Mordu is yer uncle,' Whittler conceded, 'he was yer mother's younger brother.'

'He was the most gifted lad I ever taught. He could work potions like, well, magic. When he told me that he was planin' on inventin' potions after Hogwarts I encouraged him, I knew he was skilled enough for it. After he left I heard very little of him until three years later when he returned one night with this book in his arms. He told me quite calmly that he'd finished his masterpiece, "The greatest potion on earth" he called it. He told me he wanted me ta keep the book, as a memento of him, and I accepted. By the time I'd read through the book and realised what he was planin' I was too late; he'd turned himself into a monster. I warned your father and mother what he'd done so they'd be wary of him and thank God I had or Mordu might have got you and yer mother all those years ago. I kept the book though, out of fear of what would happen if someone tried ta copy the potion. I doubted any student would be interested enough in it and so kept it amongst the other potions books, hidden in plain sight.'

'Why didn't ye just destroy it?' Merida asked in confusion.

'Mordu had put a charm on it so it couldn't be destroyed until he was defeated in single combat and so far it hasn't happened.'

'But that doesn't explain why Mordu wants ta kill me,' Merida said. 'He's gone after me twice now, what's he got against me?'

Before answering Whittler hesitated as if thinking of how much she could say, noticing this Merida demanded, 'I want the whole truth; I'm tired of being kept in the dark.'

'Very well, in the time of the founders of Hogwarts over a thousand years ago the five clans of the highland wizards, the Dingwalls, Macintoshes, McGuffin, Dunbrochs and McRaes, were born. A lone king had once ruled over the highlands but on his death he shared the lands equally between his five sons who were the founders of each clan. For a hundred years the five clans fought to rule all the lands

and finally it was yer ancestors the Dunbrochs that succeeded. Their leader became the first king of the highland clans and it has remained that way, even now although yer no longer called kings. Mordu wants ta kill ya so he can inherit the title from yer family, that's all.'

'What did he mean about a blood-link to the land?' Merida asked, unwilling to let even the smallest thing go without an answer.

'It's just an old legend,' Whittler answered, waving her hand nonchalantly to show it didn't matter. 'The Dunbroch's are supposed ta have a connection ta the land they rule over and Mordu's hunger for all kinds of power makes him hunt it, even if is just a legend.'

'I am truly sorry young Dunbroch,' she said softly, 'I wish I could have done more ta stop him.'

'That's fine Professor, I'm sure ye did yer best,' Merida replied as she stood up and left the room without a second glance. The other three left hurriedly after her, giving a quick thanks to the Professor.

Professor Whittler sat quietly at her desk for a while, looking down at the book that Merida had left on her desk.

'That was close,' the raven said from his perch. It said a lot about how draining it had been to talk to Merida for Whittler when she couldn't be bothered to swipe the bird away.

'I was on the edge there,' she agreed, 'but she mustn't know the truth until she's fifteen. None of them can know the truth until then.'

Merida shook the others off when they tried to comfort her, telling them she wanted to be alone before heading up to the common room. She sat in front of the fireplace, her thoughts flying about her, the secret was finally out and she felt no better for it.

She sat in the squashy sofa for what felt like an age, the room eerily quiet as there were only a few second and first years around. She heard the entrance way open and a second later Fred sat beside her, carrying a heavy bag filled with sweets and magical joke items.

He rifled through it for a moment and triumphantly pulled out the broom maintenance kit Merida had bought with him hours ago and placed it to the side so Merida could pick it up when she wanted.

'Your friends told me you were having some family issues,' he said kindly after they had sat quietly for a few minutes.

'That's an understatement,' Merida murmured, slightly annoyed the others had brought Fred into this.

'Let's go out and practice quidditch then,' he said as a reply, causing Merida to look at him as if he were mad.

'What? It's a great way to work out aggression, especially if you can aim the bludger at whoever's pissed you off and get away with

it.'

Merida snorted in laughter but stopped quickly, the new revelations still too strong to allow her to keep happy for long. Even so she agreed with Fred and went to grab her quidditch stuff before heading out to the pitch with Fred. She wasn't going to forget what she'd discovered forever, and she'd have to deal with it eventually, but for now she could forget it all for the next few hours.

* * *

><p>It has been one hell of a week. I'm sorry this chapter's so late; I didn't have the chance to go on my computer from Thursday to Monday.

On the plus side I think someone owes Sword slasher a chocolate frog.

Hopefully I can return to the usual routine now so I hope you guys enjoyed the chapter and thanks for reading :)

12. The Quidditch Final

The Quidditch Final

Merida spent the Easter holiday at Hogwarts; she couldn't face her parents just yet, the secret they'd kept from her was still too fresh. She'd been alone as the others had already made plans back at their homes, they'd even offered her to stay over if she wanted but she politely refused.

It had been surprisingly fun even so. Professor Bunnymund especially, got into the holiday spirit; locking himself within the most tropical greenhouse to paint a vast assortment of chocolate eggs, varying in size from a chicken's egg to a dragon's, with the help of certain magical plants. She discovered there was a certain war between Bunnymund and North over whose favourite holiday was better, Christmas in North's case and Easter in Bunnymund's. It explained why the Christmas and Easter decorations would grow more extravagant and imaginative every year.

On the day itself she had wandered into the Great Hall and was invited by Toothiana to sit at the single table set up for the teachers and students that hadn't returned home, laden with all forms of pancakes and toppings with North and Bunnymund arguing animatedly over which holiday was better.

'Well at least you've got all year to prepare. I'm working with perishables here!' Bunnymund yelled angrily at a smiling North.

'If you say so Bunny,' North had replied sarcastically, starting another bout of arguments.

After that Merida and the rest of the students, as well as the teachers, had spent the day egg-hunting for all the eggs Bunnymund and the house-elves had hidden around the castle. Everyone had come away with large bundles of the chocolate goodies stuffed in their robes. Even Toothiana, who disliked chocolate, had found several boxes of toothflossing stringmints that Bunnymund had studiously

hidden in her office, earning him a large hug from the Transfiguration teacher.

Her parents sent her a few letters during the holiday, one attached to a box of chocolate eggs her mother had hand made. She didn't answer any; except for a single thank you for the eggs because she really loved her mum's homemade chocolate, but aside from that she didn't know what to say to them anymore.

* * *

><p>After the return to school however, the fun of the Easter holiday quickly vanished as Merida's workload seemed to double. Not only where the teachers piling on more homework in preparation for the upcoming exams but she had to order them around her daily quidditch practices. It was no easier for Jack who had just as heavy a workload as the Gryffindor-Slytherin match began to loom ahead.<p>

The competitive spirit between Merida and Jack was at an all-time high. Both of them wanted to prove their worth to their teams and were afraid of the retribution if they failed. Jack knew Mulcaster would jump at any weakness he showed on the pitch and Merida feared for the friendship she had made with Fred, would he still treat her the same if she failed to pull her weight?

In the week before the match the teams found they were getting the worst of the charged atmosphere between the two houses. None of them could walk around without the enemy house trying to trip them up or sneakily jinx them. As such both their captains ordered that all players be flanked by a crowd whenever they left the common rooms, even Merida and Jack were guarded by a small group that included the only Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw to get involved.

James had repeatedly warned Jack to be wary of hanging out with Merida in case she tried to sabotage him to help her house but Jack had constantly reminded him that Merida wouldn't try anything underhanded like that.

'No, she'd prefer to break my neck on the pitch than break my leg off it,' he'd told James grimly.

Merida was also given a warning to be wary of Jack from Alice, although it went a bit more like, 'If he tries anything funny, jinx him between the eyes.'

* * *

><p>All the usual activities were abandoned in the common rooms the night before the match. The four had decided to spend the night in their common rooms as they agreed it was too dangerous to wait out curfew with Merida and Jack when there would probably be a few people prowling around, hoping to find an easy target that would give them better odds.<p>

Fred and Merida dealt with the pressure by playing a loud and energetic game of exploding snap. They were joined by two of the seekers, Fred's girlfriend Ashleigh Marsh and his best friend Flynn Ryder. Alice Chang had spent the last half hour staring intently at a model of a quidditch pitch, making any mental alterations to the plans that she had already drilled into the team's heads.

Jack and Mulcaster sat on opposite sides of the room in the Slytherin dungeons, too nervous to bother with each other. Mulcaster dealt with it by boasting loudly to his usual gang of admirers about how he'd started quidditch training at the age of four, which he was sure was much earlier than some people. Jack spent the time sitting with James Turner who, like Alice Chang several floors above him, was trying to calculate what seemed like every possible move that could be made on the miniature pitch.

'We'll need to keep an eye on your friend of course,' Turner was saying quickly, 'she's ferocious with a Bludger.'

Hiccup and Rapunzel sat in their own common rooms, trying to read or draw but failing miserably. They had their own reasons to be nervous for this match.

Eventually, after what seemed like an age, Alice and James stood up in their respective common rooms and ordered, 'Team! Bed,'

* * *

><p>The Slytherin and Gryffindor teams, including Jack and Merida, arrived in the Great Hall at the same time, keeping a wary distance from one another as they simultaneously walked through the large double doors of the Hall. Jack and Merida caught each-other's eyes as they passed and gave a grin and a friendly nod before they were dragged to their tables which were both roaring and clapping tumultuously.<p>

Hiccup and Rapunzel, who had also come into the Hall for the day, ran over first to Merida then Jack to give their support.

'Be sure to look out for us today,' Rapunzel told them, her cheeks painted red and gold on one side and green and silver on the other.

'Yeah, we've got a surprise for you,' Hiccup had agreed, his own cheeks painted in a mirror image to Rapunzel's.

Both teams ate quickly at the urgings of their captains and were ushered out when they had finished so they could get a good judgment of the weather conditions.

'Not bad, all in all,' Alice had said as they walked to the pitch and the Gryffindor changing rooms. 'Sun's not shining too strongly, gives perfect visibility. No wind that I can feel although I imagine there'll be stronger currents higher up; we may need to watch out for them. Not bad conditions for a last match I say.'

'This is your last match?' Merida asked. She had forgotten that as a seventh year Alice wouldn't be returning to Hogwarts.

'Well, I've got an acceptance from the Howling Harpies. If all goes well I'll be playing for them next year.'

'Which is why you're going to leave Hogwarts with a bang, we're not letting you go without a victory,' Fred promised to general cheers from the rest of the team.

* * *

><p>Neither team spoke as they changed; even Fred, who was usually the most exuberant team member, or Mulcaster, who rarely shut up, stayed quiet. After what seemed like only a few seconds they could hear the cheers of the crowd outside and knew it was time.<p>

When the teams stepped out onto the field the noise of the cheers, muffled by the walls of their changing rooms, hit them like a wave. On one side of the pitch half the crowd seemed to be wearing or waving red. Banners covered in roaring golden lions fluttered across the stands and above them Professor Toothiana, who'd magically changed the colour of her feathers from green to a shining red for the occasion, danced in mid-air and performed a few looping tricks as the Gryffindor team arrived.

On the other side the Slytherin supporters cheered, covered in green and waving their own banners that read 'Go SLYTHERIN!' and 'SNAKES FOR THE CUP!'. At the front stood Professor Whittler who, on seeing the arrival of her own team, took out two beakers from her robes, shook them together and threw them high into the air. At the peak of their rise the fizzing concoctions exploded, turning their glass containers into sand and smoke that unravelled and twisted into a giant silver snake that hissed at the red half of the pitch before biting into its own tail and eating away at itself until it vanished.

'And here come the Gryffindors,' came a familiar voice from the commentator's box, 'Chang, Dunbroch, Weasley, Marsh, Ryder, Spinner and Flint. Easily considered to be the best line-up Gryffindor's had for some time, especially their new beater, just ask the players she's sent to the hospital wing.'

'Rapunzel we're not supposed to be biased remember,' a second recognisable voice cut in over her.

'Shut up Hiccup, I know what I'm doing.'

Merida and Jack couldn't help themselves but laugh; it was definitely as surprising as they'd been warned. Rapunzel and Hiccup as commentators! Everyone knew the last commentator, Nicola Springer, had quite but how on earth did those two get the job? They looked up and saw the two standing above them, Rapunzel currently talking into the microphone with Pascal on her shoulder, changing constantly between red and green. Hiccup was standing slightly to the side but was still close enough to the microphone for his own voice to be heard.

'And here are the Slytherins, led by Captain Turner,' Rapunzel continued as the teams lined up in front of Madam Hooch, ready for the whistle. 'Looks like a pretty fearsome group too, this looks to be a pretty tough match.'

'Captains! Shake hands!' Hooch ordered as Alice and James stepped towards one another.

The two captains shook one another's hands firmly, giving each other the nod of one professional to another before parting and returning to their teams.

'Mount your brooms! Oneâ€|Twoâ€|Three,' at the sound of her whistle they all kicked off and the two teams were soaring into place as the quidditch balls were released after them.

'And it's Gryffindor in possession, Naomi Spinner of Gryffindor has the Quaffle and is heading straight for the Slytherin goal posts. No, intercepted by Warrington, Warrington now has the Quaffle andâ€|ouch, good Bludger from Merida, I mean Dunbroch. Quaffle back in Gryffindor now with Marsh and she's going for the post, IT'S BLOCKED! Zero all, Slytherin with the Quaffle.'

Hiccup's voice was now booming over the pitch, his time riding the super-fast Toothless, for what had nearly been four years now, allowed him to keep greater track of the zooming shapes that were the players.

While this was going on Jack was hovering above the other players to get a better view of the pitch, always searching for the Snitch. He also kept an eye on the Gryffindor seeker Alice Chang who was circling away to the side, if she made a move for the snitch he'd know about it.

'Marsh passes to Ryder and Ryder's heading for the goal, is he going for the score? Yes, he is! Andâ€|WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT!'

From above Jack could see it all. Flynn Ryder was racing towards the goal while the Slytherin keeper and captain, James Turner, was preparing to block when out of nowhere Mulcaster had appeared on Ryder's right, seemingly to intercept the Quaffle. Instead of trying to grab the ball however, Mulcaster grabbed the chaser's broom instead and swung out with his free hand, punching Flynn Ryder in the nose.

'YOU FILTHY CHEAT,' Rapunzel's voice rang out, clearly quidditch brought out an unusual side of her, 'YOU ROTTEN SCUM, WAIT UNTIL I GET MY HANDS ON YOU!'

Hiccup was joining in with Rapunzel's yells; shaking his fist at Mulcaster and shouting what looked like swear words although he wasn't close enough for the microphone to pick it up.

'Penalty!' Hooch roared, flying between Mulcaster and the furious Flynn as Mulcaster tried to explain he was reaching for the Quaffle and missed, 'Never in my years have I seen such a blatant attempt to sabotage another player.'

'What the hell Mulcaster!' Jack yelled down to the scowling chaser as Flynn Ryder, his nose still bleeding, took position to take the penalty.

'Ryder takes position and...Yes it slips through Turner's fingers, TEN-ZERO TO GRYFFINDOR!' Hiccup's voice rang out, drowned out by the cheers from the Gryffindors and boos from the Slytherins.

The game continued without any further offensive actions from either team, although both Merida and Fred simultaneously sent both Bludgers at Mulcaster when he had the Quaffle, forcing the chaser to drop the Quaffle and roll to get out the way or let several of his bones get broken. The scores of the game continued to fluctuate as the Slytherin's, angered by the Gryffindor's early lead, had hit back

hard and soon the score was 80-50 to Gryffindor.

This wasn't good, Jack knew. Currently the Slytherins were winning in their bid for the Quidditch Cup by one-hundred and seventy points, so if the Gryffindors caught the Snitch while they had thirty points or more higher than Slytherin in the match they'd win the cup.

Suddenly he saw it, a flash of golden light by the base of one of the Gryffindor goalposts. He dived after it realising immediately that Alice Chang had seen it too, and she was closer to the posts than he had been and was already gaining on the small golden orb. Jack lowered himself further on his broom and willed it to go faster, feeling the wind rush around him as he accelerated.

'I think the seekers have seen the snitch!' Rapunzel's voice yelled excitedly, interrupting Hiccup's commentary of the chasers.

'Chang's ahead of Jack but he's gaining, come on Jack!' Hiccup called out as he realised what was going on.

'Oh, and _I'm _biased?' Rapunzel's voice spoke up, causing some people in the stands to cheer and laugh.

Jack hardly noticed their voices; his whole world now consisted of only him and the Snitch. He and Alice were neck and neck, both reaching out to the Snitch mere inches away. His hand was closer, his fingers brushed against the smooth surface of the Snitch and he lunged to grab it, pushing Alice's hand away.

WHAM! A Bludger grazed his shoulder, sending him into a spin away from the snitch. 'No!' he yelled out in desperation but it was too late, Alice's hand had closed around the Snitch to cheers from the red side of the pitch.

He righted himself and looked around to see who had hit the Bludger at him. Of course he knew who it was before he saw her, Merida sat on her broom above him, panting from the speed she'd used to catch the Bludger in time to hit it towards Jack. Jack groaned and hit his head twice in exasperation against the head of his broom before looking back at Merida and giving her a defeated smile. So she'd won, fair and square.

The two teams flew down together, the Gryffindor's hugging and cheering and the Slytherins looking thunderstruck, Jack included as he tried to rub some feeling into his shoulder.

'Tough luck Jack,' Henry Warrington, a chaser, told him sympathetically.

'I told you we shouldn't have let him on the team,' Mulcaster sneered, not at all sympathetically.

'What, you think he let himself get hit by that Bludger?' Thomas Carrington, one of the beaters, asked incredulously.

'He's friends with that Gryffindor!' Mulcaster protested, sticking to his old argument.

'Enough Mulcaster,' James sighed, rubbing his eyes.

'James, I'm really sorry. That Bludger came out of nowhere,' Jack began hurriedly, afraid of the worst.

'Don't worry about it Jack, we can't win them all. We're not going to drop you or anything.'

'You can't be serious captain!' Mulcaster began before the rest of the team cut him off.

'Shut up Mulcaster,'

'Yeah, if you hadn't given them that bloody penalty they wouldn't have had enough points to win the cup anyway,'

'I said enough,' James ordered, standing taller over his them, 'we're a team remember, we don't put blame on each other. Now let's go and give our congratulations to the Gryffindors and head back to the common room, they'll have prepared food for a party I'm sure.'

They trudged over to the smiling Gryffindor team and James offered his congratulations to Alice who thanked him in return.

'You were good,' she continued turning to a surprised Jack. 'That was one hell of a last match; my heart was beating so loudly I was sure the whole pitch could hear it.'

'Uh, thanks,' Jack said in reply as Alice vigorously shook his hand.

'Well done guys,' Rapunzel called over to them as she and Hiccup rushed towards the teams and pulled both Jack and Merida into a hug at the same time.

'What did you think of our commentating?' Hiccup asked as he reached them.

'Brilliant,' Jack told him heartily as Rapunzel let him go, 'How the hell did you both get the job?'

'Professor North saw us during the last match wearing mixed house colours. He told us there was an opening for commentator and said together he hoped we'd be the least biased for a single house,' Rapunzel told them quickly.

'Come on Jack, you can talk with your friends later,' James said cheerily as he put an arm around Jack's shoulder, 'right now I have to show you and Mulcaster how to drink away your sorrows with butterbeer.'

'And that reminds me,' Alice said as she put a hand on Merida's shoulder, 'I expect Merida to come with us and enjoy the full celebrations for once, no sneaking off half way through, if you all don't mind of course.'

'Nah, not a problem,' Hiccup told them, 'we sort of expected that anyway.'

'See you two later then!' Rapunzel called after them as the two were herded away by their teams before linking arms with Hiccup and hurrying after the crowd that was heading back to the school.

* * *

><p>The Gryffindor celebration party lasted for hours but felt like weeks. Students had brought indoor fireworks to set off at random intervals to gasps and shouts from the crowd while the tables were filled with all manner of sweets and cakes. Even the prefects, who should have been keeping some kind of order, were participating in the chaos.<p>

Merida weaved her way through the crowd of people who all turned to congratulate her for the amazing Bludger shot. Alice had even given her the Quidditch Cup at one point and made her hold it up to cheers from the crowd. Fred had congratulated her too but was currently in a corner with Ashleigh and Merida though it best to leave him be.

'Hey Merida!' Flynn Ryder called to her from the entrance portal that he had just climbed through with a fellow fourth year, 'there's someone out there looking for you.'

'Who?' Merida asked as she came over to only be answered with a shrug. Intrigued she stepped through the entrance way herself and out onto the landing in front of the Fat Lady to be greeted by her parents.

'Well done lass!' Fergus cried as he pulled her into a proud hug, 'that was a beautiful Bludger shot.'

'We're very proud of you,' Elinor agreed, a smile on her face that nonetheless said she thought proper witches didn't play as beaters.

'What are ye doin' here?' Merida asked in a stunned voice.

'Well we weren't goin' ta miss ye first final now where we,' Fergus said as he let her down.

'We were also worried,' her mother added with a look of concern, 'we understand that you needed some time away, Professor Whittler told us what had happened, but ye weren't answerin' our letters and we were gettin' concerned.'

'Well I have a lot of things ta think through,' Merida replied defensively.

'We understandâ€|'

'How could ye never tell me?' Merida asked suddenly, cutting off her mother.

'We didn't think ye were old enough,' Fergus tried to explain; 'We didn't want to burden a child with it.'

'Mordu's tried to kill me twice now!' Merida reminded him angrily; she felt it was an important point. 'Didn't ye think I was old enough to know last summer?'

'I know, I know,' her mother returned suddenly before stopping and starting again more slowly. 'He was my little brother; he was there the day you were born for pity's sake. It was so hard for me to see

what he had become and I couldn't bear to let you go through that too. I wasâ€¦ashamed of what had happened, and scared when he started goin' after you. I didn't know what ta do.'

There was a silence after that as they all took in what had been said and then Merida asked, 'So, what now?'

'We've got guards patrollin' the borders of our territories lookin' for the monster and you know more now to stay careful. It's safe for ye ta come home,' Fergus told her truthfully.

'Of course I'm comin' home,' Merida told them to the relief of both parents.

'Good, good, that's good,' Fergus said happily, 'well, we'll leave you ta yer party, we left the triplets with Maudie and ye know how they can be with her, the little scamps.'

Her mother gave her a kiss on the cheek before she said goodbye and they both descended the steps of the castle. Merida watched them go with a sad smile before returning to the common rooms and re-joining the party. She hope one day, she'd be able to trust them again.

* * *

><p>After the Quidditch final the four found themselves finally accepted by the majority of their houses. Merida was a quidditch star among the Gryffindors and Jack was forgiven his loss by most of Slytherins who had seen Jack's near miss and accepted he would have won if not for that Bludger. All except Mulcaster and his gang of course who still saw him and the other three as scum but, for once, they were alone in that thought.<p>

Hiccup and Rapunzel found themselves more accepted as well thanks to their commentating, parts of which had made the crowd laugh so hard they'd miss parts of the match. Together all four were accepted at last and returned to eat at the Great Hall with their houses, except for two days every week when they would descend to the kitchens and re-join Grindl and the other elves for old time's sake.

All together, the four had never been happier at school.

* * *

><p>Mordu prowled through the dark woods back to the ruined castle that served as his home. Merida would soon be returning from Hogwarts for summer but this time she would be better guarded and prepared, he wouldn't be able to get near her again. Snarling he swiped at the base of a tree, his sharp claws cutting away half the bark causing the tree to fall.<p>

He had been so close, she was in his jaws and he could have ended it all there but those other brats had interfered and she'd slipped through his claws again. No matter where she was his niece was protected, whether it was her father, friends or Hogwarts itself, he couldn't get to her. He arrived at the top of the hill where the rubble of his castle stood, when he had the power this castle would be rebuilt in his image from the stones of the Dunbroch stronghold. He saw ahead that someone was sitting on one of the large chunks of stone and immediately readied himself, his claws stretching to

deliver a quick killing blow to the intruder.

'Now is that anyway to treat a guest,' the figure said to him as they stood up.

'**Do I know you?' **Mordu asked, recognising the voice.

The man smiled as he walked down towards the bear, showing no hint of fear. He was dressed in the darkest robes the demon-bear had ever seen, they seemed to blend perfectly with the shadows cast by the castle walls.

'My name is Pitch Black,' the man said, 'I advised you on parts of your potion, I'm glad it turned out so well.'

'**Ah yes, Black. I thought you had been sent to Azkaban,' **Mordu enquired, still ready to strike if the dark wizard seemed a threat.

'Someone's not been keeping up with the news,' a voice to his side said.

Mordu turned his head quickly, snarling at the potential attacker. A woman was sitting at his side with her legs crossed, perfectly at ease. She had striking black hair that was edged with a little silver and a face that could have been considered kind once but had changed to a far more sinister appearance.

'**I don't know you,'** Mordu said to the woman, '**so I suggest you pay me greater respect if you want to live.'**

'Oh, a threat from the king of a dilapidated castle, I'm so scared,' the woman mocked back, drawing her wand as Mordu snarled and turned further towards her.

'Enough Gothel,' came the voice of Black, sounding both like a command and a suggestion at the same time.

'Fine, fine, we _are all_ in this together I suppose.'

'**Why are you here,'** Mordu growled angrily, baring his teeth at Black.

'Gothel and I have a proposition for you,' Black offered, looking directly into the bear's black eyes.

'**I'm not interested,'** Mordu returned, readying himself to crush Black's head if he or his woman dared to attack.

'It will get you the Dunbroch girl,' Black told him softly.

Mordu stiffened slightly, his hackles rising and the spears and arrows in his side moving as if in some terrifying dance.

'**I'm listening.'**

'After the fall of that snake Voldermort, the dark wizards of the world have been kept on the run. When I left Hogwarts I thought I had learned from his story but it was only after my own incarceration that I truly understood the problem, one wizard alone, no matter how

powerful, can control the wizarding world. So what I propose is a council of sorts, the three most powerful dark wizards alive; you, Gothel and myself united as one to rule the world,' Black recited, his eyes gleaming with a dangerous light.

'**What does that have to do with the Dunbroch girl? '** Mordu asked impatiently.

'Well, to stand together we must first unite so we may trust one another and there _is_ something that we all share. Tell me, do you know of Miss Dunbroch's group of friends?'

'**Yes, the white haired one, the girl with the blonde hair and the boy with the metal foot. What of them? '**

'You want to kill the Dunbroch girl; well _I_ want the life of the white-haired boy, Jack Frost. Gothel here wishes to retrieve the blonde one, alive.'

'My little flower Rapunzel,' Gothel crooned in a voice that dripped with sinister purpose.

'Together they present a€| surprisingly formidable force, but I have a plan. It will take some time but it will be worth it and what's more it will give us time to gather more forces, the dark wizards around the world will gladly bow to our power. So what do you say?' Black asked temptingly, 'The chance to have the Dunbroch girl in your jaws _and_ the power to rule over not just these highlands but a third of the world.'

Mordu stood quietly for some time, his bear's face giving away no emotion that the humans could see. Finally he reared back on his hind legs to tower over the two, leaning down so his muzzle would be nearer to Black's face as the dark wizard looked up to him, smiling.

'**Deal, '**

* * *

><p>Update: Okay to answer a few questions. I know the last few chapters were very Merida centred but that's mainly because I was doing the Mordu mystery thing and she's heavily involved with that, I promise the others are going to get more time now we're moving on.

**Secondly, for those asking for Hijack have no fear. I was waiting until the four were a little older before I started bringing in relationship subplots and the next chapter begins in their fifth year. Believe me when I say the Hijack stuff is going to get a lot more obvious in the next few chapters. **

Hope that's helped and thanks for reading :)

13. The Prophecy

The Prophecy

'Seriously Rapunzel, ye can leave some books at home,' Merida

complained as she and Rapunzel tried to heft the blonde's heavy trunk onto the train, her own trunk was already waiting in a compartment.

'I know butâ€¦I just can't decideâ€¦which ones,' Rapunzel panted between tugs at her trunk. After another few minutes the trunk finally gave way and slide up onto the carriage to exhausted sighs and cheers from the two women who collapsed onto the floor.

'Hey guys,' Jack greeted as he stepped over them and lifted his own trunk into the overhead luggage in their compartment.

'Of course you arrive after all the heavy liftin's done,' Merida said sarcastically as she got up while Rapunzel began to pull her case after them.

It was now the start of their fifth year and the three had all changed from the young eleven year olds they had been when they first met. Rapunzel had grown much taller than she had been although the most striking growth was of course her hair, which now hung to her feet even in its braid. Her face had matured as well, making her even more beautiful which was evident from the way the guys that passed their carriage wouldn't stop staring as they went by.

Jack had grown taller too and was now easily the tallest of the four, standing a couple of inches above Rapunzel. His own features, like Rapunzel, had grown more handsome, forcing him to spend much of his fourth year avoiding his fan girls. His body had become more athletic too over the years, from a combination of his training with Merida and Professor Maximus as well as his quidditch practice which gave him a thinly muscular look.

Merida was the shortest of the four, although she had still clearly grown which was a fact she had to remind Jack of several times. Her long red hair still hung in curls and tangles around her head as it always had and always will and like Jack her body had grown more athletic from constant practice and training.

'I've got to get back out there and help my sister up,' Jack told them as Rapunzel dragged her trunk the last few inches into the compartment and under her seat.

'Ooh, ye sister's comin' this year?' Merida asked excitedly. They'd heard stories from Jack about his younger sister but had barely met the girl personally except for a few brief glimpses of her waving her brother away as they headed to Hogwarts.

'Wait for me, I don't want to miss this,' Rapunzel called as she hurried after them.

At the trains door they met a shy looking girl with brown hair looking down nervously at the trunk in front of her as her mother stood next to her, giving comforting words.

'Aw, she's all nervous,' Rapunzel whispered happily to Merida.

'Where's the white hair?' Merida whispered back, 'I wanted to see a mini-Jack with long hair!'

'What's the matter sis?' Jack asked as he kneeled to look the girl in the eye.

'What if I don't fit in at Hogwarts?' The small girl, who was called Mia Frost, asked, 'Or if I get lost, or don't do well at lessons?'

'You don't have to worry about that,' Jack said soothingly, 'Of course you'll fit in and don't worry about getting lost, everybody does in their first year. Don't worry about doing well in lessons either, Merida does terribly and she's alright.'

'Hey!'

Mia giggled at this and the worry seemed to vanish from her face for a moment. She allowed Jack to heave her luggage onto the train and went to join her friends in a compartment further down the carriage.

'I'll wave you off honey,' Jack's mother called after her before shaking her head and sighing. 'It takes my half an hour to calm her down but it only takes you five minutes and an insult. You're going to be a great parent one day Jack,' she finished giving her son kiss on the cheek goodbye while Merida and Rapunzel looked sceptically at one another.

'Where's Hiccup,' Merida asked when Jack had returned, looking around the crowd in hopes of seeing the small Berkian.

'Over here!' Hiccup's voice called to their left. They three turned and each of their jaws dropped in surprise.

'Whoa,' Merida said quietly while Rapunzel just whistled.

'Nngh,' was all Jack could say as the Berkian arrived, pulling his trunk behind him.

Hiccup had also changed, what was becoming subtly evident through their third and fourth year had suddenly become obvious. Hiccup now stood as tall as Rapunzel, his metal foot had had to be tweaked to the right size to match his sudden growth spurt. His face had lost the last of its baby fat and had become older and more handsome. Years of riding a nightfury had finally caught up with him and his broad chest and arms seemed far more muscular.

'I can literally feel yer fan-girls slipping away from you,' Merida whispered to Jack who didn't respond as he was still staring at Hiccup.

'Hiccup, you look amazing,' Rapunzel told him, making Hiccup blush.

'Oh, thanks Rapunzel,' he said, awkwardly rubbing the back of his neck.

A second later they heard the whistle that signalled the train's departure and hurried on before it left without them. Jack had to be pulled on by a grinning Merida because he was still standing as if dumbstruck. They waved goodbye to their families as the train left the station and then settled back into their carriage, spending the

journey talking about their holiday, trading chocolate frog cards, discussing quidditch matches they'd seen that summer and playing a game of Bertie Bot's fishing which Hiccup lost, again.

* * *

><p>As ever at the Welcome Feast the sorting was performed before the feast itself began. The four sat at the individual tables and watched the group of small first years look about them in awe and fear as they were led into the Great Hall by Professor Bunnymund. They could all see Jack's sister in the middle with her own group of friends, gathered together in a sort of cowering huddle. One by one the new students were called up to have the old sorting hat placed upon their head and " after Finnegan, Jeremy " Frost, Mia was called out.<p>

They all watched as little Mia walked up to the stool and had the sorting hat placed on her head by Professor Toothless. There was a moment's silence as the Hall waited for the hat's decision and eventually it called out RAVENCLAW. Jack clapped along with the rest as he watched his sister run towards the Ravenclaw table with the hat still on her head before hurriedly turning back and handing it to Toothiana. To be honest, after spending four years with his best friends all in different houses, he didn't really care which house his sister was sorted into.

Rapunzel made room for Mia to sit beside her and soon all the new students had been sorted and food magically appeared onto the tables, starting the feast. When everyone had eaten their fill, and were sitting back luxuriously to digest the meal before heading towards their dormitories, Professor North stood up to address them.

'Welcome back,' his voice boomed over the assembled students, 'I have short announcement before you may leave to your common rooms. I am pleased to say that this year Hogwarts will be hosting the Tri Team Tournament between our fellow schools, Beauxbatons and Durmstrang.'

A loud and excited chatter began at his words with additional shouts like, 'You're joking!' and 'No way!' Professor North waited with a smile until it subsided before continuing.

'For those of you who know of the Tournament, entertain yourselves for a few moments as I explain. The Tri Team Tournament is a new invention that began after the last failure of the Tri Wizard Tournament. While, like the original tournament, it is designed to be very dangerous, the changes made to it have insured greater safety for all participants. Instead of each school having only a single champion, this Tournament requires a team of up to six members to represent their school. And so, as there is safety in numbers, the age restriction has been reduced to fifteen this year, meaning any in fifth year or above may apply to participate. The delegation from Beauxbatons and Durmstrang will be arriving in October and I'm sure you will extend every courtesy to our guests. And with that I bid you goodnight.'

There was a loud chatter as everyone left the Great Hall. Everybody was talking and speculating over who would apply, what the three challenges would be for the teams or when the other schools would be

arriving. The four had joined in with the crowd and were making speculations of their own when they were stopped suddenly by their heads of houses.

'Is something wrong Professor?' Hiccup asked Bunnymund, confused as the rest of the students filed out of the Hall and left the four and their heads alone.

'Yes Haddock there is something wrong, but not with you,' the Herbology Professor replied with a look of "what?" pity in his eyes. 'You and your friends are to be taken to the Headmaster's office; we'll explain when we get there.'

The four looked at each other in concern as they were herded to the Headmaster's office. At the gargoyle that guarded the entrance Toothiana gave the password, 'Candy canes,' and the four entered into the office for the second time in their lives.

The circular room was very much like it had been the last time, with the long rows of previous Headmasters lining the walls, all asleep as before. The four could only spot two small alterations to the room that they hadn't seen before, first, two scimitars now hung behind North's empty seat and second, a stone basin filled with water had been moved into the centre of the room.

'Ah you are here,' North cried as he entered from a side room. 'Please have a seat,' he continued, waving his wand to make four wooden seats appear before them.

'What's going on Professor?' Rapunzel asked in confusion as they sat down.

North hesitated before answering, his exuberance fading as he looked between the four heads of house who had lined themselves around him, as if asking for support. Eventually he took a breath and said, 'We have information for you. Information you must know, now.'

'It is difficult to know where to begin,' he said as he struggled for words before continuing. 'We are all part of a society that was built many years ago, eight in fact, called the Guardians. We came together to prevent a dark wizard from starting the Third Wizarding War, well you know him of course, Pitch Black.'

'Wait, you fought Pitch Black?' Jack asked in surprise.

'Yes, your father was also a member,' North told him.

'My dad?' Jack asked in shock.

'Yes, it was because of him Black was defeated the first time round after all. He and the rest of us were all gathered by Manny Moon who saw potential in us all to fight the dark.'

'Astronomy Professor Moon?' Hiccup asked incredulously. The Astronomy Professor was always a more reclusive teacher, staying in the Astronomy Tower for much of the time. Even during his lessons students rarely got a glimpse of the teacher and only knew him by his voice which seemed to float down from the moon and the stars themselves as the students looked into the heavens.

'He has a great skill in seeing people's character and their potential to do great good,' North answered as explanation.

'Anyway,' Bunnymund added, steering the conversation back to the point, 'when Black was defeated we returned to our normal lives, believing our role was over, but soon we discovered we were wrong.'

'A fellow teacher gave North's predecessor new information that meant the Guardians would stay vigilant,' Toothiana continued off from Bunnymund. 'That teacher was Professor Trelawney and what she gave us, was a prophecy, a prophecy about you.'

Merida couldn't help but snort at the idea. 'Professor Trelawney?' She asked in amusement, 'That hack couldn't predict what the weather will be like five seconds from now.'

'Not quite,' North corrected, 'every now and then Trelawney makes an accurate prediction. With yours her total is up to three.'

'The important thing is that you must hear it yourselves at the age of fifteen,' Toothiana told them, 'which leads us rather neatly to the pensieve.'

Rapunzel gasped in awe as she realised what she was seeing. Toothiana smiled at the girl's excitement as she led the four to the stone basin so that they could all look into its still waters.

'Memory magic's a certain specialty of mine,' she informed them as she took a golden vial from her robe and took out what looked like a tooth formed from concentrated silvery mists. She held it for a moment and then let it fall into the pensieve's waters. 'You must all watch this, but don't worry, we'll explain everything when you're done.'

She left the four to watch the waters of the pensieve where swirls of silver were forming from the tooth Toothiana had dropped in. Suddenly they all felt as if they were plunging forward into the dark waters of the pensieve, they clutched at each other as they fell while darkness swirled around them. As suddenly as it began, their descent stopped and the four found themselves back in Headmaster North's office, except it wasn't. For a start North and the other teachers had vanished and were replaced by a strange woman the four had never seen who was sitting at the Headmaster's desk, writing on a piece of parchment.

'Uh, hello?' Hiccup asked, waving his hand at the woman who didn't take the slightest notice.

'Don't bother Hiccup, I think we're in this woman's memory,' Rapunzel told him as a knock came at the door and the woman looked up.

'Come in,' she called and the door opened to reveal Professor Trelawney, covered in her usual tacky bangles.

'Oh, good evening Sybil,' the woman greeted cordially before returning to her parchment, 'For what do I owe the pleasure.'

'Good evening McGonagall,' Trelawney replied in her usual drawl as

she sat in front of the woman, 'I have come to inform you of some important information that I believe you should be aware of, after all we have grown to a mutual understanding after our unity against Doloresâ€|'

'The Pink Hag, yes,' McGonagall said with a smirk and a look on her face that said she already knew what was coming.

'Yes, well I thought it best for you to know that the spiritual world has drawn very close tonight and that you must be wary offâ€|'

'Honestly, she's completely barking,' Merida said, cutting off whatever Trelawney believed McGonagall should be wary off.

'Indeed Sybil, well I'm sure I'll be justâ€|Sybil?' McGonagall was saying in reply, stopping and leaning forward in worry as Trelawney slumped forward in her chair.

The other four looked at each other in confusion and wandered closer to the teachers to get a better view of what was going on. Suddenly Trelawney sat bolt upright, making the four jump, her eyes, which were magnified tenfold by her glasses, turning a misty grey.

'_The Dark Lord Pitch Black shall return,'_ she intoned, her voice much deeper and hoarser than before. _'He shall gather forces of great power to his side and the dark wizards of the world shall bow to their might. But that which they seek to destroy shall be their undoing. The four, born of great bloodlines, shall lead to their defeat: the True Queen, the Winter Trickster, the Sun's Child and the Beast Tamer, who shall find unity in separation but must not learn of their destiny until the age of fifteen. Together their blood shall bring forth the magic that will stop the Dark Council, magic born from that which they fail to understand. But this magic can only awaken from a sacrifice; a sacrifice of life, for one must die so the others may live._

With the last words the scene began to fade around the four and they felt themselves rushing back out from the memory and soon stood back in front of the pensieve. They all stood still, unable to speak as Trelawney's last words echoed in their heads, _for one must die so the others may live_. The teachers guided them to their seats hurriedly before they collapsed and the four sat there dumbly as the words still bounced through their heads.

'One of us has to die?' Hiccup asked eventually in horror.

'No,' North replied quickly with a certainty in his voice that made the four look up.

'Not every prophecy is fulfilled,' Bunnymund told them reassuringly, 'some of the times only parts of them come true or none of it at all.'

'What did it mean though,' Rapunzel asked desperately, '_Why_ does one of us have to die, how will that awaken some special magic?'

The teachers all looked at one another; deciding who should speak, and eventually Toothiana hovered forward.

'It's complicated Rapunzel, but we promise to tell you what we know. All Magic begins with blood; that's where your magic comes from; it's why there_ are_ wizards and witches. The four of you, however, areâ€|unique. The magic that flows through you, your bloodline, is special. Merida, yours for instance is better known in legend. Your family are descended from ancient kings and their bloodline developed a connection to the highlands they ruled over, it became known as the King's Blood and those who had it were known as the True King, the ones born to rule.'

'Wait, you told me that it wasn't true,' Merida said accusingly to Whittler who was looking sheepish.

'I said it was a legend not that it wasn't true,' Whittler admitted. 'I couldn't tell ye this until now, when ye turned fifteen. It's what Mordu wants; as yer descended from both his family and the Dunbrochs he believes that if he kills ye in battle he'll get the King's Blood.'

'How do ye even know I have this King's Blood?'

'You drank from zhe firefalls,' North told her simply. 'Zhey say only those born with zhe King's Blood are brave enough to climb it. That's part of what zhe bloodline gives you, great courage and the drive to train and hone your battle skills.'

'So what about me?' Jack asked, 'what's so special about my blood?'

'Your family's specialisation in ice magic of course,' Tooth answered simply. 'Generations of your family have learned and invented winter spells that no one else knows; it's sort of seeped into your blood. We realised you were the Winter Trickster after you'd survived that fall into the frozen lake.'

'What's that got to do with anything?' Jack asked as the others looked at him curiously. He'd never really told them about his little accident.

'You survived it, which was proof enough for us that you possessed the right bloodline. You should have died but the magic within you reacted to the cold, it changed you so you would live. Didn't you ever wonder why your hair changed colour or why you could suddenly perform ice magic without speaking?'

'Not really, I just kind of rolled with it.'

'But what about me?' Hiccup asked uncertainly, 'I don't have any special powers like Jack.'

'You think so?' North asked, looking at Hiccup strangely. 'And yet it was you that saw past hundreds of years of hatred and ended a thousand year long war with zhe dragons. You, and only you, saw that everything we knew of zhem was wrong. _Your _power comes from your ability to make connections with magical animals, zhe Beast Tamer see. We knew you were the one when we heard of Berk's miraculous change of heart to zheir dragon brethren.'

'How did I get this magic then?' Rapunzel asked curiously, 'after all I'm muggle-born; I shouldn't have any _special _magical blood.'

'You were zhe last for us to find Rapunzel,' North told her truthfully. 'Of course your...errâ€|old predicament didn't help. I knew you were zhe one though, I could feel it in my belly. When your father told me zhe story of how a magic flower had saved zhe life of his pregnant wife I knew you were zhe Sun's Child. Zhe flower, you see, is spoken in old stories, a magical flower given power by zhe sun that could heal any sickness or wound. I believe when it healed your mother it transferred its powers to _you, _giving you zhe bloodline of zhe sun. That's why your hair carries healing powers and it's why you are zhe fourth of the bloodlines.'

'Ok, so we have this special magic, that still doesn't explain why one of us has to die,' Merida pointed out impatiently.

'That part's more complicated,' Tooth told her steadily. 'In ancient times, before the founders of Hogwarts time, blood was used to channel magic rather than wands, after all, it responds to your specific magic best. In those old times, sacrifices were used for the strongest spells and no spell was stronger than the ones created when a person sacrificed their lives for others. Your bloodlines are especially unique because they are supposed toâ€|resonate with one another. We theorise that if one of you sacrificed your life for the other three the resonation between your bloodlines will be affected by the power the sacrifice creates, you will all grow stronger than any wizard before has ever been.'

'That's crazy,' Hiccup said defiantly, 'How could you possibly know that for sure.'

'We didn't until four years ago,' Bunnymund answered. 'Tell me Frost, when you stupidly went out to fight Black what were you thinking?'

'I don't know,' Jack answered, 'I was angry I guess, about my dad.'

'And?'

'Andâ€|I wanted to stop him doing it again. That's right, I told myself I'd stop him from hurting my friends or die trying.'

'When Black cut your throat the resonation began to take effect,' Bunnymund told them triumphantly, 'The sacrifice you'd unknowingly made began to make you all stronger. That's why you all managed to block Black's killing curse, something _no one_ has ever done before, because your magical power had grown beyond anyone's limit. It faded immediately after Rapunzel healed you though otherwise the resonation would have lasted for longer, or become permanent, we're not really sure.'

'We didn't want to tell you zhis so soon,' North told them at the looks on their faces, 'but zhere have been some worrying reports from our sources. From what we gather Black's forces are already moving.'

'So we're going to have to fight this dark council soon,' Hiccup asked in a defeated voice, 'and one of use is going to have to die to give the others the power to survive.'

'I already told you I won't let that happen,' North said firmly, his determination radiating from him in waves. 'Not every prophecy is fulfilled you know. We've told you of the prophecy as it asks, but only because we thought you deserved to know, not because one of you will have to die.'

'While the Guardians still stand, we will protect you,' Toothiana told them, hovering at North's side.

'We will fight, so you won't have to,' Bunnymund continued as he moved to stand on North's other side.

'We will do all in our power to stop Black so you won't have to,' Whittler added as she stood next to Tooth.

Mansnoozie said nothing as he stood to attention next to Bunnymund but a thumbs-up made from golden sand appeared above his head.

Together the Guardians stood before the four, a wall of strength and safety that would shield them from the dark fate of the prophecy with all their might. With the surety radiating from their teachers the four couldn't help but feel a little comforted, their anxieties washing away for a short while.

'It's getting late,' North noted as he looked towards a clock hanging from the wall, 'if you have no more questions I think it is time for bed.'

'I don't think any of us are going to be able to sleep professor,' Merida told him truthfully, her words accompanied by nods from the others.

'Very well,' North said, nodding understandingly, 'you may keep each other company tonight until you are ready for sleep, you will not be punished for breaking curfew this one night.'

'And children,' he called after them as they headed out of his office, all of them looking at the ground, 'don't forget what we promised. I swear I will use all my power to make sure you live normal teenage lives.'

The four walked through the dark corridors of the castle without speaking; they didn't know what to say. They eventually found a place to sit on the step of the Grand Staircase and remained there for some time, letting the hours pass in a comfortable, mutual silence. When the moon had risen to its full and Hogwarts was bathed in its silvery light they all felt a tiredness seep into their eyes and knew it was time. They said goodnight and travelled to their separate dormitories, curling into their beds and allowing sleep to take away the memories of the past for a few blissful hours.

* * *

><p>And the secret is revealed, what do you guys think?
>)

As ever thank you all for the amazing reviews you've been sending and thanks for reading :D

14. The Tri Team Tournament

****The Tri Team Tournament****

The four found it surprising how quickly they adapted to the news of their potential destiny. The month of September was just so busy and full of things for them to do that the prophecy became a distant memory faster than they realised. Merida and Jack spent many of their afternoons playing quidditch with their teams; with the hosting of the Tri Team Tournament the teams had been told all house quidditch matches were cancelled this year so they were spending as much time as possible making up for it.

'Perfect,' Fred had complained on hearing the news, 'just as I get made Team Captain. I'd better get into that Tournament.'

Rapunzel and Hiccup were kept busy as well because they had to organise their growing homework load, which Jack and Merida ignored, around their other activities. Rapunzel began to spend even more time with Madam Pomfrey, learning stronger and stronger healing spells with ease much to Madam Pomfrey's approval. Hiccup on the other hand had begun spending more time in the Forbidden Forest with and without Gobber, alone except for Toothless.

Learning of the prophecy had almost been an eye opener for him in some ways. A week after hearing it he had descended to Gobber's hut and met Toothless, who ran into him at full pelt, knocking him over as he laughed.

'It's good to see you too buddy,' he laughed happily as the dragon began to lick at his face in a surprisingly cat-like way. 'Are you ready for an adventure bud?' he asked as they both calmed down, looking into the dragon's green eyes, and smiled as Toothless unfurled his wings in preparation, kneeling down so Hiccup could get into his saddle and clip his foot into its spot.

'We're heading for the Forbidden Forest,' he told Toothless as they sprang into the air and his worries about the rest of the prophecy began to fall away below him, 'I need to make a few tests.'

For Hiccup, learning of the possibility that he or one of the others might have to sacrifice their life for each other was only part of what he'd understood that night. He'd learned he had a special power over magical creatures, if that was true then it needed to be tested and his scientific mind was already making plans for exactly how that could be done. He'd made a respectful friendship with the centaurs over the years and now he wanted to go deeper, the Forest had many mystical creatures within its boughs and he was going to find out how far the powers of the Beast Tamer extended.

As such, when October and the day of the arrival of the Beauxbaton and Durmstrang delegations came around, the four were found waiting outside their last lesson of the day, Defence Against the Dark Arts, talking animatedly as normal about how they thought the schools would arrive.

'I'm sticking with Floo powder,' Rapunzel was saying with certainty, 'the Great Hall has a large enough fireplace for an entire delegation to come through, I'm sure of it.'

'They're going to want to be flashier than that,' Merida dismissed with equal certainty.

'Well it won't be by dragon,' Hiccup said thoughtfully, 'Berk would have heard about it.'

'Maybe they'll just take the train,' Jack said in mock seriousness, hunching over and resting his chin in his hands as if he were a detective trying to solve a murder, much to the annoyance of the others.

'Hey Fred,' he said, ignoring the scathing looks from the three and waving nonchalantly at Fred who was walking up the corridor to them with his friend Flynn Ryder. Flynn was a couple of inches taller than Fred with a leaner body, honed from his years as a chaser. He was already growing the beginnings of a goatee, the dark stubble forming a small shadow across his chin, which made him look a year older than he actually was.

'What are ye doin' here?' Merida asked in confusion, both Fred and Flynn were in the year above and had no reason to be joining them as far as she knew.

'We've come to say hi to the guest speaker,' Fred said mysteriously as the door to the classroom opened to reveal a stranger that no one in the class had seen before but nonetheless looked strangely familiar.

'Hello Fred,' the man said cheerily at the sight of Fred, 'Come to say hi have you?'

'Hey Uncle Harry,' Fred greeted back as Flynn waved, looking more nervous than the four had ever seen before on the rare occasion they'd met him.

'What's going on?' another voice that was clearly Professor Maximus' asked. 'Why are you too blocking my class?'

'We've got a free period and we wanted to join in, after all, we found it pretty educational the last time and as a teacher you can't say no to two students willing to learn,' Flynn said, catching Maximus' attention and causing the teacher to shoot him a look of deepest loathing.

'Funny, I don't remember you being so eager in previous lessons,' Maximus said scathingly as he looked Flynn up and down.

In response Flynn only shrugged, raising his hands in an attempt at an innocent look, which everyone could see wasn't innocent at all. Maximus looked him up and down for a moment before rolling his eyes and opening the door to let the two sixth years in as well as the rest of the class.

'One step out of line and I'll make sure you regret it,' he called after them as the two boys sat, grinning, at a table. The rest of the class filed in and sat at their usual tables, watching the stranger with curiosity as Maximus walked to the front of the class and cleared his throat.

'Today we have a special guest teaching so the lot of you keep quiet because this'll be the only time (he looked in annoyance at Fred and Flynn) you'll have the chance to learn from Harry Potter.'

The class gasped as the realisation dawned on them while Harry Potter, the boy who lived, replaced Maximus at the front of the class. They all now realised why he looked familiar, almost everyone owned his chocolate frog card from which his face had looked out at them. He was a lanky man with untidy black hair and round glasses that sat over brilliant green eyes but of course everyone in the room, save Fred and Flynn, looked to his most renowned feature, the lightning scar etched across his forehead.

'Good afternoon class,' he greeted, seemingly ignoring their stares, 'could all of you move your desks to the side of the class please as this is going to be more of a practical lesson today.'

His words were obeyed quickly and soon the room echoed with the scraping of desks and chairs as they were dragged to one side of the room or the other. Harry then had them spread out in the room and began to tell them of the spell they were going to try and perform; the patronus charm.

'It needs the happiest memory you've got,' he told them as they began to repeat the incantation and wave their wands with nothing happening, 'let it fill you up and then use the spell so it's strengthened by as much happiness as you can give.'

Fred and Flynn grinned at each other and raised their wands simultaneously, both calling out, 'Expecto Patronum!'

Two silvery lights erupted from their wands and formed into two separate animals that began to play and chase each other around the room as the class looked on in envy and wonder. Fred's was a husky dog that jumped and ran, barking around Flynn's flying magpie patronus.

'Well done you two,' Harry congratulated as he patted them both on their shoulders, 'they were only mist shields last year.'

The four looked enviously over at Fred and Flynn before returning to their own attempts. So far only Rapunzel had managed to make anything but a light silvery mist that hung immobile in the air.

'Expecto Patronum,' Jack said, waving his staff and groaning loudly when nothing happened. He wanted to show up Fred and Flynn with an even better patronus, like a dinosaur or something.

Merida was scrunching up her face in concentration as she whispered determinedly to herself, 'Think happy thoughts, happy thoughts.'

Hiccup was also repeating the spell but nothing was happening for him either. In the end he waved his wand angrily around in exasperation and said, 'Why did it have to be a charm, every other type of spell I can do but charms take me weeks to learn, I could practice at something this advanced until the end of time and not get so much as a slug patronus out of it.'

'Don't give up Hiccup; imagine it, watching dementors run away from

your terrifying slug, oh the horror!' Jack said, gasping in shock and horror as he wrapped an arm around the boy's shoulder and waved his arm in the general direction of the imaginary battle.

Everyone, including Hiccup, laughed at that only to be interrupted by Rapunzel yelling, 'I've got it, I've got it!'

Flying around her head was a silver bird as large as a swan with three long tail feathers streaming behind it. Everyone clapped in appreciation as they watched the silver beauty soar around the ceiling.

'Well done, the only other person I've ever known to have a phoenix patronus was Albus Dumbledore,' Harry Potter's voice said behind them, making them all jump and then stand awkwardly, watching the most famous man alive talk to them. 'How are the rest of you doing?' he asked in genuine curiosity, apparently not seeing their looks of awe and admiration.

Merida immediately raised her wand in eagerness to impress him and, in the split second before she called out the spell, she groped in panic for a strong enough happy memory that would fuel her patronus. It was as if every happy memory she'd ever remembered had hidden behind the door, leaving her with nothing to think over. She thought desperately as her mouth began to form the words of the spell and suddenly a memory hit her, the day her father had taken a history lesson with her and had instead begun a swordfight training session. She'd been so happy at that moment just as her brothers dropped a mounted boar's head onto Fergus' own head, blinding him and allowing her to trip him with her sword.

'Expecto Patronum!'

A silver mist flew from her wand and hovered beneath Rapunzel's phoenix, who was still circling the ceiling lazily as Harry Potter and the others congratulated her.

'Good work, don't worry about it not being fully formed, it takes some people years to learn this,' Harry said before turning to Jack expectantly.

Jack pushed up his sleeves theatrically as he spun his staff around, causing a few people who were now watching the four to laugh unintentionally. He thought back to the day he'd taken his sister ice skating again after his second year, freezing the lack surface solid to ensure no one would fall in this time, that day they played as they should have done then and his sister's laughs of delight as she skated and dodged around snowballs he'd begun to throw towards her still made him smile.

'Expecto Patronum!'

A silver mist erupted out from the end of his staff and mixed with Merida's, seeming to strengthen it into an almost solid fog. He huffed in annoyance at the lack of anything cool but soon smiled again as everyone congratulated him too.

Finally it was Hiccup's turn and everyone turned to him with an expectant look. The first three of the four had all been able to make something; naturally Hiccup could master the spell alongside them.

Hiccup raised his wand expectantly and called out the spell once again, his voice echoing off the stone walls of the class.

'Expecto Patronum!'

Nothing happened. 'Aw COME ON!' Hiccup cried out in exasperation as the crowd, except for the three and the teachers, laughed at him.

'Don't worry about it,' Harry told him reassuringly as the rest of the class lost interest and returned to their own attempts, 'keep practicing and I know you'll get it.'

By the end of the lesson only Rapunzel had managed to summon a fully formed patronus while a few others had been able to create semi-transparent mists like Jack and Merida, the rest, including Hiccup, hadn't been able to make a thing. The four hung back to help Maximus move the chairs and tables back, Hiccup scowling at the furniture as if it had just insulted him, so as to listen in on Fred and Harry's conversation, as they were all using the winguardiam leviosa charm to do it the excuse was pretty flimsy.

'So Harry, are you coming to watch the Tournament?' Fred asked loudly, so as the four and Flynn could hear.

'I'll be coming in to watch the tasks,' Harry replied. 'Headmaster North thinks it's a good idea for one of the judges to be the last tournament winner.'

'Although it's not exactly like I remember it happily,' he muttered darkly as an afterthought.

'Flynn and I are applying together,' Fred added proudly, hoping to cheer his uncle up.

'Really? Well don't expect me to show any favouritism,' Harry responded jokingly as he ruffled Fred's ginger hair.

'Shouldn't you lot be heading off anyway?' Maximus asked as he manoeuvred the last chair into place. 'The delegates will be arriving any minute now.'

The four looked at their watches and realised the Professor was right, it was nearly time for the arrivals and people would already be gathering in front of the grounds to watch out for the two schools. They all hurried quickly out the door and were soon followed by Flynn and Fred who yelled a hasty goodbye to a laughing Harry.

'So are you guys going to join?' Flynn asked them as they all ran down to the Grand Staircase.

'It's temptin',' Merida mused, tilting her head as she thought about it.

'I'm not,' Hiccup said firmly, 'I've heard what happened in the old Tournaments. Call me cautious by I don't want to be turned inside out and apparated over a five mile radius simultaneously.'

'It won't be that dangerous Hiccup,' Jack smiled at him as they

reached the stairs, 'and if it is, I'll make sure you stay safe.'

'Uh, thanks Jack,' Hiccup replied, blushing slightly.

'Ugh, looks like we've been beaten to the punch,' Fred groaned as they looked down the stairs and saw the entire school cramming themselves through the doors to get outside. 'We're never going to get to the front that way,' he continued, slyly pulling out the old parchment Merida new as the Marauder's Map Mark II and whispering the password, 'but if we go down there we'll find a secret passage that'll take us to the front of the crowd.'

'And how on Earth do ye know that?' Merida asked in a sarcastic manner.

'Trade secrets,' Fred replied in a similar tone as he tucked the map back in his robes.

They all followed Fred down the corridor he had pointed out and soon they were emerging from a hole in the wall that had formed at the touch of Fred's palm into the cold outside air. As the last of the group got out they headed off to get a good view while the hole closed itself back up, stones and mortar sliding back into place with barely a whisper.

The Hogwarts students waited for a good ten minutes before anything happened when a third year girl shrieked shrilly and pointed into the sky above the Forbidden Forest. As one the students followed her gaze and stared at a rapidly growing dot on the horizon. Soon they could make out that it was a large horse drawn carriage being driven by six horses. People began to yell and back away as they realised the sheer size of what was approaching as the carriage came in to land. The horses were easily each the size of an elephant and their hooves shook the ground as they landed while the carriage itself was many feet larger still, although in spite of its size the enormous carriage somehow managed to land so smoothly that it made no sound as it touched the grass of the grounds.

The massive door of the carriage opened and golden steps unfolded from the door to the ground. Out of it stepped one of the largest women any of the four had ever seen, explaining the size of the carriage. She was old, around eighty, her hair greyed and her face aged but she still carried herself without a stoop and walked with easy long strides. Professor North walked forward to greet her, kissing her hand without needing to bend and saying a brief greeting.

'Thank you North, it iz good to see you too,' the woman, whose name was Madame Maxim, said in return. 'As Mycroft arrived yet?'

'No you are ze first to arrive,' North informed her. 'Would you care to come inside? Your students look rather chilly.'

North had a point the others noticed as the Beauxbatons delegates emerged after their headmaster. They were all dressed in what looked like blue silk that offered no real protection against the oncoming winter chills. As they hurried past, many heads turned to watch them go, primarily men's.

'Blimey, do you think they make them all like that in France?' Fred asked while Flynn merely wolf whistled quietly.

'Fred, ye have five seconds ta remedy that statement before Rapunzel and I curse ye both,' Merida warned him as she and Rapunzel pulled out their wands, grinning.

'Oh come on, I didn't mean anything by it. Jack you know what I mean right,' Fred implored as the two women began to count slowly.

'I don't know Fred,' Jack replied cheerily, he had watched the girls go too but with a slightly disinterested look, 'I prefer people who can handle the cold. What did you think Hiccup?'

Hiccup, who hadn't watched the girls at all as he was a little too focused on someone else, gave a noncommittal shrug before laughing as Merida and Rapunzel finished their counting and charged the two helpless sixth years.

'Look at the lake!' Someone suddenly yelled out, stopping the girls actually cursing Fred and Flynn, who were laughing just as hard as Jack and Hiccup, and making everyone turn to stare down at the Black Lake which was beginning to churn and swirl unusually as something began to emerge from it. First came a long wooden pole that turned out to be a mast which was soon followed by the large hull of a ship as it rose from the dark waters. Soon the students could see movement along the deck and a stream of men dressed in furs and warm coats began to walk up to the castle, led by a man dressed in black and dark brown.

'Nicholas my old friend, how are you?' the man boomed in a deep voice as he embraced North in a strong hug.

'Very well Mycroft, I trust you had a pleasant trip?' North returned as they broke apart.

'Ah, you know how it is, I never feel better than when I am behind the wheel of that ship,'

They continued conversing as they walked into Hogwarts, the Durmstrang and Hogwarts students hurrying after them, and soon everyone was packed into the Great Hall as dinner began. The delegate students spread out among the four tables and sat among the Hogwarts students as the food appeared, the four noticed that very few of the delegates were their age. Instead they were mostly seventh years with only a few rare exceptions, clearly their headmasters weren't willing to risk the Tri Wizard Cup on someone they deemed too inexperienced.

At the end of the feast the dining tables were moved magically to the side as all the students stood up expectantly. The four gathered together and moved to the side with the rest of the students as something was wheeled into the middle of the room. It was a stone goblet mounted on a pedestal, blue flames licking at the air from within it, The Goblet of Fire.

Stepping forward, North spoke, his voice carrying over the unusually quiet students, 'As I am sure you are all excited to move along I shall make zis quick. Anyone who wishes to enter ze Tournament must place zeir name into ze Goblet of Fire, our impartial judge. It is

important to note that you cannot give ze Goblet a name other than your own, zis is to ensure only participants who are willing, will enter. If you wish to have ze chance to work alongside friends who are also willing to compete you may use a piece of parchment with all your names written down, if one of you is selected zen ze others will be too. I suggest you don't enter zis competition lightly, if you are selected you cannot leave halfway through; you must stay in it to ze end. Of course, ze reward is certainly worth it, zis year we have managed to scrounge three thousand galleons for the winning team to split amongst themselves. And for any of you underage students, who are attracted by zis, please note ze other headmasters and I have drawn an age barrier around ze Goblet that will prevent anyone younger than fifteen from entering zeir name. With that I say goodnight and good luck.'

His speech over, North turned and walked out of the Hall, talking happily with the other headmasters as they left all the students to watch the glimmering fires of the Goblet.

'We have got to apply,' Jack said eagerly as he fumbled in his pocket for a scrap of parchment.

'Three thousand galleons!' Merida yelled as an image of the prize money floated in front of her.

'I'm still not sure about this,' Hiccup replied, his old nervousness sneaking through.

'Three thousand galleons!'

'Come on Hiccup, you'll be fine,' Jack returned reassuringly as he began to write their names down on the paper.

Hiccup watched Jack's face as he wrote down his own name, as well as glancing at the girls who were looking just as excited, before sighing and nodding in agreement. 'Alright, alright, I'll do it. You guys are right, it does sound worth it.'

'Three thousand galleons!'

'Why do you keep saying that Merida?' Rapunzel asked with worry.

'I've never had the chance to say three thousand galleons before,' Merida breathed back.

When all their names were written on the parchment the four stepped into the queue that had already formed in front of the Goblet. Five people ahead of them Fred and Flynn high-fived one another as they slipped the parchment carrying their own names into the fires. Finally it was the four's turn and together they all held the parchment containing their names over the Goblet and let it drop where it seemed to vanish as the fires consumed it.

'Seemed a little anti-climactic to me,' Merida murmured to them later on, 'I mean ye'd hope it would spit a bit of fire back out or something right? Just to show it had accepted the names.'

'All that matters is that we're going to get in, I just know it,' Jack said, a strange gleam lighting his eyes.

* * *

><p>The four spent most of the next day sitting in the Great Hall and watching people as they placed their names into the Goblet. People would go to it in groups and drop their names into the stone Goblet before leaving or hanging around like the four to watch the show. Every now and again a few underage students would waltz in, believing they had just come up with an idea that would trick the ghostly age line that hung around the Goblet. The four always found it fun to watch as each would-be champion was thrown from the circle with beards that rivalled Professor North's growing from their face.<p>

Finally dinner came and everyone once again sat at the four tables, slightly squashed together to make room for the Goblet, only speaking in murmurs as they all made furtive glances to the stone pedestal bathed in the light of the Goblet's blue flames. When dinner had finished everyone took the same positions they had the night before, the four joining together to wait for the Goblet's decision as they had when they awaited its arrival.

The three headmasters took positions around the Goblet in a ceremonial fashion and waited as they looked into the Goblet's flames while everyone else held their breath in anticipation. Suddenly the flames sprang up and flared as the Goblet spat out three charred pieces of parchment which were nimbly caught by Mycroft. He smiled triumphantly and began to read out the six names of the Durmstrang team 'Abramova, Baikov, Derevenko, Gurov, Manakov,' and ending with a loudly called, 'Dmitri Krum!'

A loud roar of approval erupted from the Durmstrang students as their team assembled with Krum, son of the famed quidditch player Victor Krum, in the middle, basking in the attention.

'Like father like son,' Rapunzel called over to the others who looked at her with curiosity, 'his dad was a champion in the last Tournament.'

Before any of them could make a patriotic reply about how, like his father, Dmitri would lose to the Hogwarts champions, the fires of the Goblet began to grow again as it spat out another piece of parchment which flew up into the hand of Madame Maxime.

Like Mycroft, Maxime called out the names of her chosen students, 'Belrose, Augustine, Janvier, Palomer, Lyon and Mercier!' As their team walked up to the front, causing several men to turn their heads and watch as they walked away, to stand beside the Durmstrang team their fellow students both applauded and cried out in annoyance and sorrow at not being chosen.

There was silence again as everyone waited for the final names to be drawn and soon the silence was filled with the crackle of flames as two final pieces of parchment flew into the air and fell into North's waiting palm.

He looked down at the paper for a moment before speaking, as if he were trying to think through a difficult problem. 'Ze Hogwarts champions are,' he bellowed, 'Merida Dunbroch, Rapunzel Solaris, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III, Jack Frost, Fred Weasley and Flynn

Ryder!'

There was a tumultuous clapping coupled with sighs of disappointment as the stunned four made their way up to the front of the Hall alongside Flynn and Fred and stood in front of the three headmasters next to the two teams who would become their competition.

As the thunderous clapping continued North raised his hands for calm before speaking, 'Your teams have been chosen; support them well through ze trials ahead. Now if ze champions will join us in ze next room we can prepare them for ze coming challenge.'

He beckoned for the three teams to follow him and they were led into a small antechamber at the side of the hall. Three benches were set in a horseshoe shape, one for each team. The four sat with Fred and Flynn at one side and waited for the judges to begin their explanation.

'Firstly a congratulations are in order,' North beamed as he looked over them, 'you have been chosen to compete in a very prestigious Tournament that I am sure shall bring you all fame and fortune, well, ze winners anyway.'

'Now for the first task,' Madame Maxime said impatiently behind North, towering over his heavy frame, 'the aim of the first task iz very simple, to test your ingenuity and reaction to the unknown. As such, we shall not tell you what it iz, and you shall 'ave very little time to practice as the task iz set one week from today.'

The teams looked unsurely at one another as she said this, one week before the first task? They really weren't going to have much chance to prepare.

'There are two rules you must know,' North added as the teams turned back, 'you cannot, under any circumstances, accept help from another wizard, witch or squib, is that understood? Good. Secondly, in each of ze tasks you may use whatever tools you require; anything at all. That is all for today and I suggest you all hurry back to your fellow students, I'm sure parties are already being prepared.'

'Woo!' Flynn cheered as they entered a now nearly deserted Hall, 'I don't believe it! Three thousand galleons, that's five hundred each!'

'Don't forget the extra helping of fame North mentioned,' Jack added as the others smiled at the thought of owning five hundred galleons, 'I distinctly remember fame being mentioned.'

'Did you notice North was looking right at me when he mentioned the second rule,' Hiccup interrupted.

'Yeah, why?' Merida asked curiously.

'What do you think counts as a tool?' Hiccup asked with a sly look in his eye, 'Because if it means what I think it does, then North was telling me that I have one hell of a tool waiting at Gobber's hut.'

'Good idea Hiccup,' Fred said as he pulled them all into a huddle, 'so here's the plan, let's go and enjoy our house parties tonight and

then every day for the next week we spend the afternoon's practicing.'

'Bring Toothless too,' he added in a whisper as the Durmstrang students passed by.

* * *

><p>As the Hogwarts team enjoyed their parties that night, three figures were walking along the stone pebbled beach of an island just off the coast of Iceland at the same moment. The air was chilling and dark as the three figures walked, flanked by dark shapes that twisted and whinnied in the darkness, their black sand reflecting no light and leaving the night darker than ever. The only light that illuminated the path in front of the three were the yellow lights of Nightmare's eyes and a single beam shot from the wand of Gothel.<p>

Suddenly the second figure, cloaked in black robes that hid him almost as effectively as an Invisibility Cloak in the dark, stopped and cocked his head as if listening to a voice that the other two could not hear, which in fact he was.

'Excellent, the first phase of the plan is complete,' Pitch Black said contentedly, 'it seems your doubts were unfounded Gothel.'

'They weren't doubts, they were concerns,' Gothel replied irritably, they had been trekking across the beach for two hours and she was beginning to feel _it_ again, that terrible sense of ageing.

'**If you're not willing to take risks you'll never succeed, any child knows that witch,**' Mordu growled angrily as he paced beside the two.

'Oh, like how you took the risk of turning into an ugly pile of fur for a shot at a kingdom you still don't own,' Gothel returned scathingly which caused Mordu to snarl angrily at her.

'Enough playing you two,' Pitch scolded quietly as he looked around, 'We're here.'

They had reached the massive opening into a cave that stretched across the cliff face they had been walking along, unable to apperate as they did not know the exact location. It was easily large enough to fit Westminster Abbey into its cavernous depths and, with a nod from Pitch, the Nightmares shot forward into the cave and disappeared from sight.

'Finally,' Gothel sighed with relief as they waited, 'I don't know why we have to bother with this. Why can't we just kill the boy together?'

'Because dear Gothel, we cannot underestimate these children,' Black responded as they began to feel a deep banging below their feet, coming from something beneath the ground, 'I did to my cost the last time I encountered them, their combined power was enough to block the killing curse at eleven, I don't know how but they did it. Together they are a threat, so we must keep them separate at all costs and so we need to keep the dragon rider distracted.'

As he finished, a giant roar swept out from the opening of the cave, blowing hot, foul smelling air at the three before being followed by a monster. It was enormous, a dragon of insane size and proportions with claws as big as Mordu and sharper than steel. Around it the Nightmares swarmed and ran across its hide before disappearing into its mouth and nostrils causing it to bellow in annoyance. It flamed at them once, spitting out a tempest of black smoke and yellow flames that lit up the dark night, before all the Nightmares entered into its body and it grew still. Although the three could not see it, the creature's small eyes turned perfectly black as it stopped struggling.

'That's right,' Black said as he walked towards the last of the Red Deaths, the black sand of the Nightmares sifting across its brain and translating his words to the dragon's own thoughts, his mind becoming its mind. 'I have some information for you,' he continued as he flashed an image of Hiccup riding Toothless into the creature's mind, 'this boy is your enemy. He has killed your kind before but when the time comes, you shall kill him.'

With the image of the killer of its own kin playing across its eyes, the dragon allowed its mind to be overtaken completely by Black's magic, if he could bring it the human killer and his dragon traitor then that was all that mattered. It lifted its head and roared into the night, a roar of anger and hate as well as a command, any dragon that heard it would be the first to fall under its control, and soon, it would subjugate a dragon army for its master, Pitch Black.

* * *

><p>Accents, so many accents :p

Sorry this is so late guys, it has been one hell of a week and thank God it's over.

Finally we get to see Hiccup's enemy, I know some of you guys thought it would be a character from the TV series but I've only seen the movie and I also think that, as he is the one who makes bonds with animals, Hiccup's enemy should be one that subjugates them.

In answer to Leite Destiny's review, how I came up with this story was kind of funny. When I started writing the plot I didn't know anything about the Big Four but when I did I knew they were the perfect characters for the story, they kind of completed it :)

Anyway, I hope you guys are enjoying the story and have a good week :)

**(PS Don't worry the next chapter should be uploaded quicker this time) **

15. The First Task

The First Task

On the day of the First Task, lessons were to end at midday so the

teams would have time to prepare for the task and the students would have time to settle down and make bets on who would get injured first. The four felt that time was going haywire, rushing away in incredibly fast jolts, so one moment they were sitting for their first lesson of the day, Potions, and the next they found themselves sitting down for lunch.

The week between their selection and the Task had been a tiring one where the four would spend the days sitting in lesson, studying for their OWLS, and then spending their free time practising alongside Fred, Flynn and Toothless near the outskirts of the Forbidden Forest. It got to the point where the six saw no one but each other outside of lessons and usually then their faces were covered in sweat, soot and grime; hardly an appealing look for any of them.

'Argh!' Merida had yelled in annoyance one evening, 'How are we supposed to train if we don't know what the hell it is we're facing?'

'Oh, I don't know. I'm enjoying the mind numbing, gut wrenching fear of the unknown that we're currently facing so I can only imagine the fun we'll have on the day,' Hiccup replied sarcastically as he leaned on Toothless' flank, making the others laugh.

'Look, if we don't know what's in store for us then all we can do is make sure we're all able to give a good fight,' Fred said, trying to sound like a leader but in actuality sounding as irritated as Merida.

So they continued training but, as the Task had closed in, it had taken a more desperate edge; none of them knew what spells or techniques to learn so they were forced to settle with practising their best moves together in the hope that it would be enough.

As lunch finished the six saw Professor Toothiana flying over towards each of them, with everybody watching as they were gathered.

'The teams are to assemble in the grounds nowâ€¦it's time to get ready.'

They left the Great Hall together, followed by whispered words of encouragement from friends and strangers alike. Toothiana herself seemed more agitated than usual as they stepped out into the cold November afternoon, although then again, her energetic flying and hovering, as well as her rapid speech, would make anyone seem agitated in the wrong light.

'Whatever you do, don't panic,' she said earnestly, 'there are wizards on hand to keep things from getting out of controlâ€¦not that it will of course; I have every faith in you.'

'Thanks Professor,' Jack said confidently, although he was looking a little paler than usual.

They arrived at the edge of the Forbidden Forest and behind a clump of trees they discovered a large tent sitting in an enclosure hidden from view of the castle. Behind the tent was what looked like a large stadium that had been set up overnight, its outside walls so big that the Hogwarts team could tell it would easily contain the combined numbers of Hogwarts as well the Durmstrang and Beauxbatons

students.

'You have to wait in here with the other teams until the time comes,' Toothiana told them hurriedly as she pointed to the tent, 'they'll tell you what you're facing inside. Good luck.'

Turning hurriedly away, she flew back up to the School, leaving the team standing silently outside the entrance of the tent. Without saying a word they entered hurriedly, all responding to some strange fear that the Judges wouldn't wait for them to explain the rules and then refuse to explain them twice while their opponents watched gleefully.

Inside the other teams were all pacing, sitting and slouching with similar looks of foreboding that the six were sure they also shared. The moment they entered they were followed by Harry Potter who seemingly had appeared from nowhere, in one hand he was carrying a pouch of purple velvet that seemed to bulge ominously.

'Good, you're all here,' he said happily as he surveyed the blank looks of dreaded expectation in front of him, 'so, the idea is that once the crowd's arrived I'll be handing you this bag. Each team gets to pick one of the different themes we've got prepared for you and they'll be numbered for the order you go in. Wait until your names are announced and then you can walk out.'

'How are you lot doing?' he asked in a half whisper to the Hogwarts team.

'Oh, fine Harry, I always feel like my insides are doing backflips,' Fred replied sarcastically, making Harry laugh.

In no time at all they all heard the heavy fall of hundreds upon hundreds of pairs of feet outside the flap of the tent, mingling with the excited voices that laughed and joked as their owners passed by. After what felt like mere seconds but, in reality, was over three minutes, the footfalls died down and Harry came forward with the pouch.

'Ladies first,' he said, offering the bag to the Beauxbatons team.

One of them put her hand daintily in the pouch and withdrew a tree. It was about six inches tall with dark coloured bark that contrasted greatly to the incredibly bright pink leaves that bloomed at its top. Attached to its trunk was a small card with the number two on it. The girls studied it quizzically, trying to find some secret code in the bark but finding nothing.

After the Beauxbatons group, Harry turned to the Durmstrang team and their unofficial leader Krum soon tugged out another tree, slightly taller than the Beauxbatons' and with a dark red bark topped with green leaves and a number one card hung neatly over a branch. Krum began to turn the tree this way and that in his large hands, its leaves swaying as it moved, trying to find any hidden meaning in the tree.

Finally it was the Hogwarts team's turn and it was Rapunzel that pulled out the final tree with a number four attached to it. Unlike the other two its black-grey bark was twisted and gnarled with leaves

of green and silver sprouting at its top, up close they could see what appeared to be small black stones hanging in clumps from the branches. As they passed it along they all gasped as their fingers first brushed against the tree's smooth surface and discovered it was made from pure metal, its leaves made from silver and green foil, which had been moulded so deceptively that it looked like a real tree.

'As you can see,' Harry said, breaking the teams out of their intent observations, 'each tree represents the different theme your team will face. Beauxbatons has Asia, Durmstrang has South America and Hogwarts has Greece. Each of you will enter the arena, which will contain the life size counterpart to your models, and the challenge of this Task is for you to retrieve the Golden Wings that rest on the branches of each tree.'

'Seems easy enough,' Flynn said as he passed the tree from one hand to the other.

'I'm beginning to think that the danger of these Tournaments was over exaggerated,' Hiccup said in a confused tone.

'Except,' Harry added ('Oh, there it is,' Hiccup continued under his breath), 'that the tree and the Wings are guarded by the mythological creatures native to those parts of the world, you shall have to use all of your magical skill and knowledge to circumvent them and get your hands on the Wings.'

'I've got to go and join the judges,' he continued as he looked at his watch and began to walk to the exit, 'but here's one last hint. If you all hold the tree together you might get a better idea of what you're facing. We'll be calling out the first names in five minutes.'

'Is it me or did that get steadily worse by the minute,' Fred said as Harry disappeared.

'Never mind that, everyone get put a hand on the tree,' Rapunzel said eagerly as the Beauxbatons and Durmstrang teams huddled around their own trees.

Quickly the team made a circle and each grabbed on to a piece of the tree. The effect was immediate, the tree began to melt in their hands and as it did it steadily began to change colour to a golden bronze. The leaves and branches began to run down the bark in six glittering rivers that pooled into the hands of each of the team until none of the tree was left but replaced by six identical pools of gold in their palms. Before they could do anything, the six realised the pools were beginning to rise and solidify into new shapes that were first blurry globules but quickly became defined into six miniature creatures, each just smaller than Pascal. By the gasps from the other teams, similar things were happening to them.

'Wow, looks like there's at least one for each of us,' Jack said as the small bronze figure in his hand began to walk backwards and forwards across his palm.

'Does anyone want to trade for the Manticore?' Hiccup asked with a worried look into his palm where the miniature Manticore was prowling. It was a terrifying looking creature, with the body of a

lion with the face of a monkey and a large scorpion tail that ended in a wickedly sharp curve that could both cut and sting. When it snarled at him he could see three rows of minute fangs sitting in its mouth.

'Do ye mind fillin' us in on what these things are Hiccup?' Merida asked as they heard the crowd begin to cheer outside, 'After all, ye're sort of the expert on magical animals.'

Blushing slightly at the compliment Hiccup began his explanation, holding up his Manticore for their observation.

'Alright, this is a Manticore. It's pretty much one of the most venomous and dangerous creatures you could face. You have to look out for its tail because that thing can do a lot of damage but that's only the most obvious thing it could kill you with. Do you see how its mane is all spiky? Well that's because it's made up from hundreds of barbs full of paralysing poison that the Manticore can shoot at you, don't let them hit you.'

Hiccup pocketed the little Manticore and turned to Jack who was holding out his hand for inspection. In it stood a creature similar to Hiccup's, it had the body and head of a lion but, in addition, it also had the head of a goat next to the lion's and its tail was in fact a writhing snake.

'That's a Chimera, it's an insane species.'

'You bet it is! Look at all those heads,' Jack said while watching his Chimera with admiration.

'No, you don't understand. Chimeras are literally insane, they're driven mad by their own existence. You see, the lion wants to eat the goat and kill the snake; the snake wants to kill the lion and the goat and the goat wants to run away from the lion and the snake. The thing is, as they're all a part of the same body, none of them can do what they want because they know they'll die so they go crazy because they have to fight their own clashing instincts every day. They're so dangerous because any head can kill you, the lion will eat you, the snake'll poison you and the goat will trample you, occasionally at the same time. The trick to fighting them is to make the heads fight for control, like scaring the goat so it tries to run away.'

'Neat,' Jack said, still impressed as he tucked the strange creature into his own pocket.

Hiccup turned to Flynn next who was playing with his little statue, letting it coil around one finger before dropping it into the other hand. It was a snake with nine heads that constantly twisted around one another, hissing silently.

'That's a Hydra,' Hiccup said simply, recognising the famed creature immediately, 'you can't cut or hex off any of its heads because two more will just grow in its place. It's pretty venomous too and its poison isn't just in its fangs either, its breath can kill if you inhale enough and its blood is really toxic so keep back from it. The trick to fighting this one is to split its attention among the heads so they're not sure what to do together.'

Flynn didn't pocket the Hydra yet, instead choosing to keep playing

with it while Hiccup moved on to Fred who held another familiar looking creature, a three headed dog.

'Cerberus,' Hiccup said as he pointed simply at the mythical three-headed dog which growled back at him from Fred's palm, 'When it comes to guarding things it can't be beaten. They're completely loyal to their masters and will defend whatever they guard until death. You have to try and restrict its movements and knock it out because it just won't stop fighting otherwise.'

The Cerberus seemed unwilling to leave Fred's hand as he tried to pocket it, clinging to his fingers with tiny paws until it finally dropped down into his robe.

Merida was next, standing with her palm out to present what, at first, looked like an ordinary bull, with long horns that were almost half the length of its body, but on closer inspection was shown to be made from cogs and wheels.

'A Bronze Bull of Colchis,' Hiccup hazarded.

'You don't sound so sure,' Merida said with surprise, she'd never yet seen Hiccup unable to identify a mythical animal before.

'It's a little trickier,' he explained, 'the Bronze Bulls weren't actually animals. The wizards of Colchis forged them from bronze and enchanted them with magic to guard the Golden Fleece. They're pretty rare nowadays; the only person I know who can make one in Europe is Gobber. I suppose we have him to thank for this. They're stronger than ordinary bull's and they can also spit fire, I have no idea how.'

'Cool,' Rapunzel said as she leaned in to look at the bull, her eyes glittering with interest, 'I'd love to take one apart.'

'That's the spirit,' Jack joked as they watched Merida's Bull charge across her hand before stopping just before it fell over the edge.

Finally it was Rapunzel's turn but when Hiccup turned to her and the miniature creature in her hand, he paused, looking at the creature with greater uncertainty than the Bull.

'That just looks like an ordinary snake to me,' Hiccup said, confused as the snake coiled itself in Rapunzel's hand, apparently going to sleep, 'I don't see anything special about it, sorry Rapunzel.'

'Maybe they ran out of magical animals,' Rapunzel suggested as she held up the snake to the light for a closer look, 'So what's our plan then?'

All eyes turned to Merida and Fred who had both been thinking the team's options through as Hiccup described the dangers of the creatures they would have to face.

'Hiccup?' Merida asked thoughtfully as the Beauxbatons team was called out to screams and cheers from the crowd, 'Have ye made sure our old friend is ready to be called if we need him?'

Hiccup nodded, he had gone out before lunch to sneakily move Toothless to a safe spot at the edge of the forest and if Hiccup called, he would come.

'And ye know the extra trainin' ye told us you were doin' in the Forbidden Forest?'

Hiccup nodded again, he'd told the three of his and Toothless' excursions into the Forest as well as his experimentation with his newly learned powers.

'Great, so how good have ye got?'

* * *

><p>After Merida had explained the plan, the Hogwarts team had nothing to do but wait for their names to be called out. They sat listening to the magically enhanced voice of Daniel Finnegan, the fifth and final judge, commentating on the Beauxbatons team's efforts, 'Clever move, pity it backfired.'<p>

After half an hour the sounds of cheers reached a thunderous note again that clearly stated the Beauxbatons team had got their Wings, confirmed five minutes later when the Durmstrang team were called out with Krum swaggering ahead.

Finally, after what seemed like an age filled with gasps and screams, the Hogwarts team heard their names called out. They got up together and, sticking close to one another, they walked through the tent's exit with their wands drawn to emerge into a short corridor that would take them under the seats and right into the arena.

'And here they come ladies and gentleman,' Finnegan cried out as they stepped into the daylight to loud roars of approval from the Hogwarts students. They could see people standing and waving flags with the Hogwarts crest all along the stadium. Jack's sister was among them and was cheering and waving harder than anyone while Pascal, who Rapunzel had entrusted to Mia for the Task, jumped excitedly up and down on her shoulder.

In front of them the circular arena was split into three rings. The olive tree, an identical match to the statue Merida had pulled out, stood in the central ring of soft earth dotted with smooth rocks, right in the middle of the arena. They could all see the glint of gold from the Wings that rested on one of the tree's branches. The middle ring was made from flat stone raised slightly above the outer ring; on it they could see the giant form of the Cerberus who growled at the sight of them but didn't leave his post, next to him stood the motionless Bull of Colchis. The outer ring, the one they would enter first, looked like a quarry; it was filled with large rocks that formed small pathways and hidden alcoves, the six could only assume the rest of their obstacles were hiding within this stone labyrinth.

Right on cue, three large shapes sprang from the rocks and hurtled towards them. The Manticore, its tail poised and ready, was attacking from the left, jumping across the rocks rather than beneath them, similarly the Chimera was coming from the middle. Both were fully grown and stood at six feet tall on all fours, big enough for their eyes to be level with the six's. The Hydra, a twelve foot long

serpent that split in the centre to form the many necks of the nine heads, was twisting between the enclosed paths under the rocks from the right.

'Jack, Fred!' Merida called out automatically, although it wasn't necessary as the two boys had already reached into their pockets and thrown the contents at their feet. Instantly a dark cloud swallowed them and confused the animals forcing them to stop and peer into the darkness cautiously, unsure what to make of it.

'Interesting move from the Hogwarts team, using Instant Darkness Powder to conceal themselves; but they can't hide in there forever,' Finnegan told the cheering fans exuberantly.

As if goaded by his words the team suddenly sprang out of the cloud, but not together. Merida and Fred charged the Chimera, shooting stunning spells at it and causing the creature to bellow in anger before lunging at Merida, who spun backwards in mid-air to dodge its claws by centimetres. Meanwhile, Jack, Rapunzel and Flynn sprang out at the Hydra, forcing the serpent to focus two heads per enemy and split its attention. They all ran this way and that to prevent it from trying to target them one at a time, keeping the snakes distracted with irritating spells as they lunged and tried to strike, some of their heads knocking into one another as they went for two different students. Hiccup faced the Manticore alone.

'What's this? They've left only one member to fight the Manticore!' Finnegan yelled in genuine terror while the crowd gasped in horror as Hiccup barely avoided the Manticore's sting, not yet firing a spell of his own, 'Somebody, prepare the medics!'

Suddenly there was a loud screeching sound that forced many members of the crowd to clap their hands over their ears and Gobber, sitting in the teacher's seats, to look up in alarm. 'Night Fury!' He called out as he saw the sleek black shape jump into the arena, shooting a ball of fire at the Manticore, making it stumble back and scream with the angry sound of a baboon.

'Is that a dragon?' Finnegan's voice asked, now sounding as if he was about to break down with the excitement.

Oblivious to the crowd's mixed sounds of surprise and disbelief, Hiccup ran to Toothless' side and together they faced the Manticore which hung back warily, baring its fangs in warning. Hiccup took a step forward to the monster as he tucked his wand into his pocket and removed his horned helmet, placing it on a nearby rock.

'I'm not going to hurt you,' he said softly to the Manticore which looked mildly startled at the sight of a human approaching it without fear or, apparently, the desire to harm. It growled and began to spring at him but Toothless was suddenly by his side again, baring its retractable fangs at the Manticore in a very clear warning which made the Manticore hold back. The human and dragon kept walking towards it calmly and the Manticore felt a strange pang of familiarity to the human, something it had never felt for any creature, human or otherwise. Hiccup held out his hand to the Manticore, which growled softly for a moment again before subsiding as it saw no threat come from the boy. Hiccup stopped close to the Manticore so his hand was only a few inches away from the creature's strange face. There was a near silent pause as the crowd and Finnegan

held their breath and then the Manticore shifted forward and allowed the human's hand to stroke its head and spiky mane.

'I don't believe it,' Finnegan said so softly that, even with the power of the spell sonorous, the crowd could barely hear him.

The moment ended and the human and Manticore parted, although now the Manticore sat on its haunches, completely at ease with the human. Toothless picked up Hiccup's helmet in his mouth and pressed it firmly onto his head again, now slightly wet from dragon saliva. The others were still trying to subdue their animals as the team had suspected.

* * *

><p>'How many of these things do you think you can get onto our side?' Merida had asked earlier in the tent.

'_Not the Cerberus,' Hiccup had answered without doubt, 'it'll be too loyal to its master for me to do anything. The Chimera will be too unstable to listen to me, I think, and the Bronze Bull isn't an actual animal so that would be a no. Maybe I could get the Manticore â€" I'd need Toothless with me to keep it in check though â€" and then maybe the Hydra but I'm less sure about that one.'_

'_Great, then do what you can with the Manticore then help out the rest of us.'_

* * *

><p>'Are you ready?' Hiccup asked Toothless and the Manticore. In reply Toothless knelt down to allow Hiccup to settle in his saddle while the Manticore revealed its fangs in what Hiccup was sure was a smile. As one they turned to face the other fights that were going on. Farthest from them Rapunzel and Flynn were still battling the Hydra which was growing more and more furious as the two scurried around it, dodging their stunning spells and trying to strike both at once.<p>

Jack had joined Fred and Merida at some point as the Chimera had proved to be as difficult an opponent as Hiccup had predicted. It was never clear who it was going after as each head seemed to want to move in another direction, making its lunges and attacks unpredictable while also being surprisingly fast when the three heads did choose a single target.

Hiccup decided it would be best to take this one out first as it was closest, he urged Toothless forward and they rocketed into the sky together while the Manticore rushed across the stones in a blur towards the Chimera. Hiccup and Toothless rose vertically into the air before diving, with Toothless making the same screeching sound he had made on his entrance before shooting a burning fireball to the side of the Chimera at the same time the Manticore shook its mane and sent several sharp barbs in the same direction.

The Chimera was knocked on its side with the force of the flame, five singed barbs sticking into its flank. It rose again, almost immediately, and made once again for Merida, only this time the side where the barbs had stuck seemed to be moving slower.

'Did Haddock just tame that Manticore?' Finnegan screamed in excitement.

'Stupefy!' Merida cried as the Chimera came at her, pushing it back and nearly knocking it down again. However, the Chimera was still strong enough to keep going and flung itself towards Merida who rolled out of its way, there wasn't any need though.

The Manticore had caught up with its barbs and met the Chimera in mid-pounce. Dust and pebbles were flung into the sky as the two creatures fought, grappling with tooth, claw and tail. The Chimera glanced at the Manticore's side with a blow so heavy the entire stadium heard the loud thud, but the Manticore was clearly not fazed as the next minute it had flung itself at the Chimera's weaker side, the goat head. The head cried out in panic and sent the Chimera into a confused state as the lion and the snake were forced to subdue the goat with their own will while the Manticore dug into its flank with three sets of sharp teeth.

Suddenly Rapunzel cried over to them, 'We need back-up over here!'

She was now facing the Hydra alone, the others saw, and Flynn was nowhere in sight. The next second they realized where he was, in the passages between the rocks, having fallen through when the Hydra had got a lucky shot at the hand he was now clutching in pain, blood and green fluid flowing down his arm. Rapunzel was now trying to keep the Hydra away from Flynn on her own.

'It looks like we have a man down,' Finnegan's voice interjected, 'the Hogwarts team is going to have to clear the outer ring soon to let the medics in, losing points for the injury, or they're going to lose all of them if they leave it too long and force Ministry employees to intervene.'

'Incarcerous!' Rapunzel cried and ropes sprang from her wand and snagged around the many heads of the Hydra, tying them together with heavy knots that seemed unbreakable. However, the Hydra spat in anger at the ropes which soon began to smoke and break apart at the touch of whatever fluid the snake had spit and soon it was free again, but Rapunzel was ready.

She cried out more spells and the Hydra was pelted with small rocks that lifted from the ground and hurled themselves at it, the next second the rocks transformed into a flock of yellow birds that flew around the Hydra's many heads, pecking at them and giving her some breathing room to prepare her next litany of spells.

'Go Hiccup,' Fred yelled to him as the Chimera and Manticore split apart.

'Yeah, we can handle it from here,' Jack agreed as he readied his staff.

Hiccup nodded in acknowledgment before calling down to the Manticore who looked up to him before turning from the Chimera without a backwards glance to follow the shadow of Toothless towards the Hydra. Jack plunged his staff at the ground as the Chimera tried to follow, creating a thin layer of ice along the tops of the rocks in front of the Chimera and causing it to stumble and turn back to him, Merida

and Fred.

As they neared the Hydra Hiccup called down to Rapunzel, 'We'll take it from here, go take care of Flynn. Draco incendio disseptum!' He called out the spell while Toothless spat out a bolt of fire, rather than explode on contact as the flame normally did it instead struck the ground and formed a circle of purplish flames around the Hydra and Manticore that rose to ten feet high. Rapunzel, taking it as her cue, dived into the crevice after Flynn while Hiccup and Toothless landed and began to repeat the process they'd made earlier, except now with the help of the Manticore as well to keep the Hydra from striking.

Flynn's face was ash pale as he clung on to his bleeding hand when Rapunzel kneeled next to him. 'Did Pomfrey ever teach youâ€|any spells for this?' He asked through gritted teeth, half hopeful she would say yes.

'No,' Rapunzel answered simply as she tucked her wand into her robe.

'Oh wellâ€|better get readyâ€|to lose those points. Heyâ€|what are you doing?'

Rapunzel had tugged at the end of her braid after looking up and around, luckily the stones above and around them seemed to shield them from the view of the crowd.

'Just don't freak out okay,' she said as she wrapped her hair around the puncture marks on his hand, making him wince and her give an apologetic 'Sorry,' before bowing her head and beginning to sing.

The stones not only shielded her actions from view but also helped dampen her voice from the outside world, so only Hiccup was close enough to hear snippets of the song he remembered well from four years ago as he placed his hand on one of the Hydra's willing heads.

_Flower gleam and glow, _

The other heads of the Hydra began to vie for Hiccup's hands as the same bond he had made with Toothless, the Manticore and many other creatures of the Forbidden Forest began to take hold.

_Make the clocks reverse, _

Jack shot sharp ice shards at the Chimera which dodged around them, Merida jumped from Jack's shoulder as she leapt into the air and fired the petrificus totalus spell at it, taking the Chimera by surprise and hitting it in the spot between the lion and goat, freezing it completely. Fred then finished the combo by shooting out a golden light that hit the Chimera squarely between the eyes of the lion, which closed sleepily along with those of the snake and the goat. Soon the Chimera was sleeping fitfully while standing up, the petrifying curse not yet losing its effect.

'Mansnoozie taught me that,' Fred commented as he waved up to the short man who was standing under two rapidly clapping golden hands.

_Save what has been lost, _

Rapunzel hadn't been entirely correct when she'd believed that she and Flynn were out of site of the crowd. As her song drew to a close, Professor North noticed a golden light near the Hydra that didn't come from the flames surrounding it, which Hiccup was putting out, and stiffened ever so slightly as he recognised the spell.

_Bring back what once was mine, _

What once was mine.

Her spell ended, Rapunzel removed her lock of hair to reveal an undamaged, if a little bloody, hand.

'Please don't freak out,' she hurriedly cried, stopping Flynn with his mouth open in a gape of terror as he looked at his hand, ensuring he only screamed a quiet choke rather than a full blown yell that would attract too much attention.

'Oh I'm not freaking out. Are you freaking out? I'm just very interested in your hair and the magical qualities it possesses. How long has it been doing that exactly?' Flynn said quickly in a strained voice that he was trying to make sound nonchalant.

She smiled at him kindly, 'For as long as I can remember, listen I'll tell you later but right now we've got to finish this task.'

'Oh, right, we're still in the middle of something,' Flynn mumbled as Rapunzel helped pull him out from under the stones to the amazement of the crowd and Finnegan.

'My god. When did Ryder get healed? Did you see the medics go to him? They didn't? Then how the? Really? Well this really is one for the record books ladies and gentlemen because I believe Flynn Ryder's wound has been cured by Rapunzel Solaris who, I am told, has been working for the Hogwarts nurse for nearly five years now. That should save the Hogwarts team some points.'

The Hogwarts team gathered together again, with the addition of Toothless, the Manticore and the Hydra, checking each other for any injuries in worry and to discuss their next move.

'Okay, we've done pretty well so far,' Merida said, 'Good idea with the Instant Darkness Powder Jack.'

It was the perfect item to use in the situation. The team needed to see what they would be fighting first to make their last minute decisions on who would face what and the Powder had provided the perfect cover for whispered orders from Merida and Fred.

'So, I think we stick with the plan for the next two,' Fred continued, motioning to the two monsters left as the team began to head for the second ring.

The Cerberus growled as they neared, raising its gigantic hackles and baring massive teeth while the Bull still stood motionless. Nodding to one another the team split again with Jack, Merida and Hiccup in one group and Rapunzel, Fred and Flynn in the other. They began to

run and split off, Jack's group running to the Bull and Rapunzel's to the Cerberus.

The minute the group's feet touched the flat stone of the second ring the Bronze Bull came to life, fire flaring behind its eyes and gears whirring as it lowered its head and charged at Hiccup and Toothless who rose into the air just above its sharp horns and began to circle around to attack it from the rear while Merida and Jack began to cast spells at its metal flanks. The Cerberus, meanwhile, was being attacked from all sides by Rapunzel's magically thrown stones while Fred and Flynn added their own stunning spells to hers and the Manticore and Hydra, instructed by Hiccup to join Rapunzel's group, shot paralyzing barbs at its side and wrapped around its legs and neck.

The Bronze Bull opened its mouth suddenly and shot blistering hot fire at Jack who twirled his staff and created a thin mist of icy air that seemed too fragile to withstand the Bull's flames. It did, however, a massive plume of steam rising into the air as the shield and flames met.

'Merida!' Jack called as he swung his staff in a downward stroke.

'On it!' Merida called back, already running forward as Jack's staff began to rise up. Underneath her feet a block of ice began to rise with the staff, tilting slightly toward the Bull. Merida bent her knees as she felt it begin to rise faster and, as the block stopped suddenly, she added its momentum to her own as she pushed down and jumped.

'Reducto!' She cried as she rose above the Bull's head, pointing her wand to the part between its head and shoulders. Her spell shot forward at the same time the Bull twisted away, blasting off a huge chunk of its shoulder instead, damaging but not destroying it.

'Damn!' She yelled as she began to fall right on to the Bull. Suddenly a screeching to her right told her Hiccup and Toothless were coming, confirmed when the dragon's fireball hit the opening Merida had just made and blew what was left of the Bull apart. A second later Merida was caught in the talons of Toothless who looked down at her and gave a gummy smile which she returned.

'Now that's what I call a combo!' Finnegan's voice rang out as Toothless flew Merida back to the ground.

The Cerberus was doing no better; with the combined efforts of the Manticore and the Hydra slowing it down, Rapunzel had quickly trapped it by turning the stone beneath its paws into something like sticky quicksand and Fred and Flynn had combined the same sleeping spell Fred had used on the Chimera, sending the Cerberus immediately into a sleep so deep that it wouldn't wake from it for several hours.

'Is it meâ€|or is this getting easier?' Rapunzel panted as the joined together again.

'Tell me about it,' Flynn answered, 'I mean, only one near lethal accident in the whole thing.'

'So, who's goin' ta do the honours?' Merida asked as she headed for the tree and the Golden Wings nestled in its branches.

'I think it'll be me,' Jack said impishly as he flew on the winds to climb the tree before Merida. In mid-air he reached out for the glittering wings, only now could he see they were easily twice as long as his own arm span.

Something slammed into him and threw him across the arena until he hit the wall at its end where he slumped down, barely conscious. One of the smooth rocks that decorated the earth around the tree had come to life and swung out at Jack, but not a rock, a tail. The ground around the tree began to shake and shudder as what the team had presumed to be rocks began to writhe, revealing a giant snake, far larger than any of the animals the team had fought so far, coiled protectively around the tree.

'Jack!' Hiccup yelled before turning angrily on the snake and throwing flames at it with his wand, joined by Toothless who added his own and the Manticore and Hydra who, after sensing his anger, attacked the giant snake without hesitation.

While the others began to fight the serpent alongside Hiccup, Rapunzel ran to Jack who was beginning to sit up. 'Hold still,' she ordered as she waved her wand over his body, uttering a quick enchantment to detect any damage it had sustained, 'you've got a small concussion and a sprained leg but I can fix them.'

'What was that thing?' Jack asked groggily as Rapunzel began her work.

'I have no idea, but by the looks of it, it's tougher than everything else we've gone up against.'

Hiccup and Toothless had risen into the air again and were circling above the snake, shooting flames down at its head while it hissed and struck out at them. The others had joined the Manticore and Hydra on the ground where they were doing their best to restrain and stun it, but to little effect. Its tail thrashed out and Merida only just managed to jump in time for it to pass under her. Fred and Flynn meanwhile had resorted to using Mansnoozie's sleeping charm which was having no effect on the snake no matter how many times they shot it.

'It's no use,' Fred said as Merida joined them, 'it's going to need a much stronger sleeping spell to knock that thing out and we just don't know any.'

'The only chance we have is to grab the Wings and retreat while we can,' Merida suggested as Hiccup combined more fire spells with Toothless, surrounding the upper half of the snake in a flaming vortex which was soon shaken off. 'Hiccup's got it distracted; this'll be our only shot.'

'Only one problem,' Flynn reminded her, 'how are any of us going to get to the tree? We can't exactly climb over the snake.'

'That's why you've got me,' Jack said as he limped over to them with Rapunzel next to him. 'I can float one of you over on the wind to grab them, I'd do it myself but Rapunzel says she'll hex me if I

try.'

'Use me,' Flynn said immediately, 'I was a pretty good thief back in the day.'

'You were a thief?' Rapunzel asked incredulously while the Manticore was thrown off the snake's side by a particularly violent twist.

'Talk about it later. Jack, throw him now. Rapunzel, cover him,' Merida interjected quickly; Hiccup and the animals weren't going to last much longer at this rate.

Nodding his consent, Flynn readied himself but, even prepared, he shivered as the cold winds blew around him and hurled him forward towards the tree and the thrashing snake which was being restrained by large roots sprouting from the same ground it lay in, the olive tree it was guarding turning against it at the will of Rapunzel. Concussed or not, Jack's aim was true and Flynn landed perfectly on the tree, grabbing the Wings to roars of approval from the crowd that he could barely hear over the battle between the snake and Hiccup.

'Hiccup, grab Flynn!' Jack yelled and Flynn saw the dark shape of Toothless zooming towards him with the head of the giant serpent behind him, preparing to strike. Toothless grabbed Flynn in his front talons, not slowing down as he did, slipping from the grasp of the serpent whose mouth snapped closed inched behind his tail.

As soon as Hiccup and Flynn joined the main group, accompanied by the Manticore and Hydra, who had disentangled themselves from the snake, the snake twisted after them but was stopped by a massive silver dome that sprang above the entire inner circle, trapping it within where it raged against the barrier. Ministry official hurried forwards to subdue the animals and suddenly it was as if the volume had been turned up for the team.

The crowd was going wild, cheering at an ear splitting level, even the Beauxbatons and Durmstrang students were cheering for them. Although the team didn't know it, their performance had easily been the most spectacular to watch and their audience were giving them their due credit.

'Well done, that was truly amazing,' Toothiana said as she joined them from above, smiling so hard it looked as if the top of her head would fall off, 'all of you report to the healing tent immediately and you can return when the judges decide your results.'

Smiling and waving at their fans the team walked and stumbled towards the healing tent and entered it together to be greeted by a scowling Pomfrey.

'Chimeras!' She cried angrily, causing the team to flinch back, 'Manticore's and all other types of murderous monster! Honestly, I wonder if they even bother to think of your safety when they come up with these fetid tasks and—what are those _things_ doing in here?'

Hiccup had dismounted from Toothless and walked to the tent next to the Night Fury but had also been followed by the Manticore and Hydra

who seemingly wished to stay with him for as long as possible, although they were only able to fit their heads in through the tent flap as their bodies were too long or large.

'Sorry Miss,' Hiccup said apologetically as all three animals nuzzled into him, 'they're sort of with me.'

Sniffing disapprovingly she told them all to sit down and examined each one in turn, as it turned out the team had survived with only minor scratches and bruises with the exception of Jack who was force-fed a small potion to heal the last traces of his sprain and concussion.

The other teams had not fared as well, in several beds along the tent various members of each team sat with bandages dressed along parts of their bodies. They would make a full recovery within the hour; Pomfrey had assured Rapunzel when she was asked, nothing seriously major, just a few bigger burns and scrapes than what the Hogwarts team had received.

When the examination was finished she let them return outside to get their results. The team stood in a straight line, made slightly bumpier by the presence of the animals, in front of the judge's podium. First came Professor North who pointed his wand to produce a silver ribbon that formed into an eight, causing cheers from the crowd. Then it was Maxime, seven. After that Mycroft gave a bood five. Harry gave them an eight but it was Finnegan that gave them the best mark, ten. In total, they had enough points to draw with Beauxbatons in first place.

'What's Finnegan playing at?' Hiccup whispered to Jack as the crowd cheered, 'don't we lose marks if we get serious injuries.'

'I think he only cares about how good a show we gave,' Jack smiled back cheerily.

As the crowd's cheering rose to a crescendo, the Hogwarts team each took hold of the Golden wings and raised them for all to see, victorious in their first task.

* * *

><p>Dear God, this was a long chapter.

And I know, I know, the First Task is very similar to Harry's in the actual series, I try to think of it as inspiration rather than my lack of imagination.

Anyway, I hope you guys enjoyed the chapter, even if it was a bit longer (I'm willing to bet many galleons that you are both going to love and hate the **_next**_** chapter :D)**

Until then, thank you for the amazing reviews and have a great day :)

16. The Yule Ball

The Yule Ball

The Library was surprisingly empty as Hiccup, Merida and Jack sat down at a table; everyone else was making an impromptu visit to Hogsmead to go shopping. Luckily this is what the three had hoped as they needed to discuss something of the utmost importance.

'So none of us has a date ta the Ball yet,' Merida concluded in a low voice, flinging her hands up in the air in exasperation. It was now the Christmas holidays and an unprecedented number of people had stayed on to attend the much anticipated Yule Ball. North was ecstatic because he finally had the chance to outdo Bunnymund once and for all in their yearly holiday competition.

'There's not going to be Easter Ball Bunny, you may as well pack bags and give up now,' he'd said to the large rabbit one day when asked why he looked so confident. In order to ensure his victory North had brought in all the help he could find, he'd employed a large team of yetis to assist in the creation of the Ball decorations that would be hung about the Great Hall on the day. He'd also brought in the help of Sandy and Jack to combine their skills and create enormous icicles to hang from the roof that would not melt for several days, no matter what the temperature.

'I've got one,' Jack replied smugly as he leaned back in the cushioned seat.

'Inviting your sister doesn't count,' Hiccup told him in irritation.

'She wanted to go and I didn't want to disappoint her,' Jack reminded him, 'and it's not like you two haven't had any chances. I've literally watched flocks of people follow you both around to ask you to the Ball, the only reason they don't follow me around is because I'm taking my sister, we _are_ _champions_ after all.'

'The problem is, I don't know half the people who ask me,' Hiccup answered in a mortified voice, 'One girl cried when I said no, and I'd never even met her before.'

'And the other half?' Jack asked curiously.

'It's hard ta agree ta go on a date with people who used ta bully us,' Merida answered for them both, 'even if we're friends _now_.'

'Yeah, that's right,' Hiccup agreed, although not sounding entirely convincing.

'Well you could always ask Mathalda Hopkins,' Jack told Hiccup, a devilish glint in his eye.

Hiccup blushed noticeably as Merida snorted, causing the librarian to look over in annoyance at them and make a shushing sound. Mathalda Hopkins had been Hiccup's girlfriend for a short time during their fourth year, it had been a pretty poor relationship by all accounts and had mercifully ended after two long months when Toothless had accidentally set fire to Mathalda's robes and caused an argument so big between them that they had finally decided to split up. Hiccup said it had been an accident but Merida had always thought that the dragon was a lot more cunning than they sometimes gave him credit for.

'God, she was awful,' Merida said, reminiscing all the unpleasant times she'd been forced to spend with the girl, 'ye remember when she said I was only good at Defence Against the Dark Arts because I'd never bothered to learn how ta look like a real girl, and if I was so good at Transfiguration I'd be able ta turn the bush on my head into _real_ hair.'

'I said I was sorry when I found out,' Hiccup reminded her apologetically, 'I don't know why we even got together now, looking back I realise we had nothing in common, I was justâ€|going through some stuff I guess. But it's not like I'm the only one, remember Douglas Avery.'

This time it was Merida's turn to blush and Jack's turn to laugh, getting them another angry shush from the librarian who looked about ready to come over and kick them out. Before Merida could make an angry retort Rapunzel joined them and sat down next to Jack, letting Pascal run from her shoulder and onto the table where he sat, huddled in her scarf.

'What are we talking about?' she asked curiously as Jack fought to stop himself laughing.

'Douglas Avery'

'Ooh, are we allowed to talk about that now?' Rapunzel replied excitedly, leaning forward as if listening in on a conspiracy.

'No,' Merida said flatly, in an annoyed voice.

'Uh, Rapunzel, I think the librarian is going to kick us out soon. Do you mindâ€|?' Jack asked, nodding secretively towards her wand that was sticking out from her robe pocket.

'Oh yeah, good idea,' Rapunzel said as she sneakily took out her wand and pointed it towards the rest of the library, '_Muffliato_.'

Immediately they were cut off from the rest of the library, only if someone stood right next to their table could anyone hear any noise coming from the four.

'So _why_ are we talking about old exes?' She asked as she returned her wand to its pocket.

'These two haven't got a date to the Ball yet,' Jack told her, pointing his thumb nonchalantly towards Hiccup and Merida who scowled angrily at him.

'What about Fred?' Rapunzel asked Merida innocently.

'Fred's goin' with Ashleigh Marsh, his girlfriend, remember,' Merida reminded her, sounding annoyed that Rapunzel would forget such important information, 'we can't all get a date as easily as you did.'

* * *

><p>Rapunzel, like the others, had been pestered for the past few

weeks over the Ball. However, two days earlier she had finally found someone she felt comfortable enough going to the Ball with, strangely, they'd agreed to go while he was lying in a bed in the Hospital Wing.<p>

It had been a few weeks after the First Task and the team began to meet less frequently to train together, instead focusing on other things like trying to find whatever message the Golden Wings were supposed to possess that would tell them about the Second Task. Rapunzel had returned to working at the Hospital Wing with Madam Pomfrey and was sitting at the window on a short break.

She watched the grounds for a while and saw Hiccup and Toothless saying goodbye to Sting and Sickie. Sting was the name of the Manticore, a female as it turned out, and the Hydra had been named Sickie for the silver-grey colour of their scales, matching the colour of a sickie coin. They had been kept at Hogwarts for longer than expected due to the Ministry's desire to observe their behaviour with Hiccup, but now they were being taken back to Greece and Hiccup and Toothless had to say their goodbyes.

She watched as Ministry officials led the creatures away into the Forbidden Forest, probably to take them to a portkey or a safe place to apparate them away, until Madam Pomfrey called over to her.

'Rapunzel, take care of bed two for me please, he's just been brought in with a nasty jinxing accident but I've got to take care of Levin. The foolish boy took several blood blister pods and puking pastels at the same time, it's all I can do to keep the buckets empty right now.'

Nodding to Pomfrey and trying to ignore the gagging noises coming from Chris Levin's bed, Rapunzel made her way to bed two and pulled aside the sheets that protected the occupant from view. In the bed lay Flynn Ryder who seemed for now to be sleeping, or unconscious, Rapunzel couldn't see much difference.

'Flynn,' she whispered loudly, hoping to wake him up without needing a spell, 'Flynn, wake up.'

Her efforts were useless however as Flynn remained dead to the world. Thankfully Pascal came to her aid as he climbed down her arm and onto Flynn's shoulder, opening his mouth and shooting his tongue to land in Flynn's ear. Flynn's eyes opened blurrily until he looked at Pascal, the chameleon's tongue still in his ear, and cried out in horror before shaking the reptile off his shoulder, causing Pascal to slide down his bed clothes and onto the bed with an angry squeak.

'_Why_?' He asked Rapunzel when he'd calmed down and gripped his aching head.

'Sorry, we needed to wake you up,' Rapunzel apologised before taking on a more professional tone, 'Now tell me what happened and where it hurts.'

'I was duelling in Defence Against the Dark Arts,' Flynn explained as he sat up in his bed, 'then I guess I wasn't fast enough because next thing I know I'm in here and your pet lizard is sticking his tongue

in my ear.'

'He's a chameleon,' Rapunzel corrected defensively as Pascal clambered up her nurse's apron, 'and where does it hurt, your head?'

'Yeah, and my chest too,'

'Alright then, take off your shirt so I can take a look,'

'What?' Flynn asked, defensively pulling the covers further up his body.

'I have to look at your head and chest to see what I'm dealing with,' Rapunzel laughed as she pulled the bed covers gently down again.

'I don't feel entirely comfortable stripping in front of you.'

'Stop being such a baby. The faster we get this done, the faster you can get back.'

'Fine,' Flynn huffed as he began to awkwardly pull the pyjama top over his head to reveal the flat chest and athletic body of any quidditch player. Rapunzel moved her wand slowly up from his chest to his head, uttering a spell to detect any important damage.

'Nothing too major by the look of it,' she said when she finished her examination and Flynn pulled his top back on, 'you'll need to stay for an hour or so and I'm going to need to give you a potion to deal with the swelling as soon as possible, I'll go get it and be right back.'

She jumped up from her seat and walked quickly up the Wing to get to the Hospital store room where she could pick up a vial of potion.

'Another admirer's brought you flowers,' Pomfrey called to her, taking her attention away from Levin for a minute as he retched into a near full bucket, 'if I were you dear I'd just pick someone already.'

'Thanks Madam Pomfrey,' Rapunzel called back to the nurse as she walked into the store room which was currently full of all the flowers Rapunzel had been sent from them many men wanting to ask her out. A new addition had joined their ranks in the centre; magical flowers that changed colour every minute, from deep red to bright green and back again within a minute.

'She's right Pascal; soon we're not going to have enough room in here for potions,' Rapunzel confided in Pascal who nodded knowingly before squeaking an answer only she understood.

'I don't know. I don't really want to go with anyone I guess; the last few months have been so confusing since we found out about the prophecy that I just don't feel like going out for the night with someone right now.'

Suddenly her head snapped up at an idea and a smile lit her face.
'Hey, what if I ask Flynn?'

Pascal squeaked back at her in disapproving surprise as they left the storeroom and began to walk slowly back to Flynn's bed, turning their conversation to a whisper so no one else would hear.

'Hear me out, he's a nice guy and we're teammates so it won't feel like a date, just two friends going with each other rather than other people. (Another series of squeaks) Well have you got a better idea? Look, I'll ask him and if he says yes then good, but if he's already going with someone else, you have to help me sort through those flowers, deal?'

They arrived back at Flynn's bed and Rapunzel gave Flynn the small vial of potion to drink which he downed in one gulp. Sitting back down in her chair Rapunzel readied herself for a moment before speaking.

'Soâ€|Flynn, you know this dance that's coming up?'

'The Yule Ball, yeah I think everyone knows about that,' he answered casually, wincing as he felt the potion make a burning trail down his chest.

'Well I've never been to a dance, ever. So I was wondering if you would take me, as a friend.'

'Ah, well no can do I'm afraid. Unfortunately dancing and I aren't exactly simpatico, you'd be better off with someone else,'

Rapunzel looked down at her shoulder to Pascal for support; he made a gesture that meant she should be more forceful, which she nodded in agreement to before turning back to Flynn. She began to move her chair closer to his bed to accentuate what she was saying.

'Something brought you here Flynn Ryder. Call it what you will, fate, destinyâ€|'

'Professor Maximus.'

'So I have made the decision that you would be the perfect person to go with.'

'A horrible decision really.'

'Look Flynn, we both need dates to this dance, it's expected of champions. At least this way, you won't be stuck with someone who'll force you to dance and I won't have to go with someone who's only interested in my looks or the fact that I'm a champion. How does that sound?'

'Not particularly romantic,' Flynn joked, 'but it's not a bad idea when I come to think of it. Okay Rapunzel, you can take me to the dance.'

'Great,' Rapunzel said, clapping her hands in delight while Pascal rolled his eyes in the agonising thought that she had settled for Flynn.

'So, I've got to wait an hour right?' Flynn asked when they'd both settled back.

'Yep, we'll know when the burning in your chest stops.'

'What should we do until then?'

'Well, unless anyone else comes in, we can play a game until you go. How about exploding snap? Or Bertie Bott's fishing, although that really needs more than two players to be fun.'

* * *

><p>'What about Astrid? You said you used to have a crush on her,' Rapunzel asked Hiccup back in the present.<p>

'She's going with Snotlout,'

'The guy she kept hitting whenever he came close?' Jack asked incredulously.

'She told me he's grown on her over the years,' Merida told them morosely. 'Honestly, what's the point? We're never goin' ta find anyone ta have fun with so why bother?'

'Why not go with Hiccup then? If it'll make it easier for you both,' Rapunzel suggested, causing both teens to blush which made their freckles become more prominent.

'What? He's like a brother ta me,' Merida spluttered.

'Yeah, we were trying to be_ less_ awkward,' Hiccup added.

'You don't have to slow dance or anything,' Rapunzel told them in an irritated tone, 'Just go together so you can have a good time if you _really_ can't think of anyone else to go.'

This caused the two to blush more and mumble something unintelligible, avoiding Jack and Rapunzel's eyes. Eventually they did agree to go together, still blushing, and shook hand to commemorate the moment.

'So, as it turns out, Fred is the only one bringing an actual date,' Jack smirked as he leaned back in his chair, 'isn't our team romantic?'

* * *

><p>The few hours before the Ball were hectic as everyone scrambled to make their last minute arrangements and get changed into their dress robes and gowns. Merida had already spent several hours in the girls dormitory trying to comb her hair straight but had given up when the brush nearly got permanently tangled in her messy curls. She'd instead left it as it always was and changed into her light blue gown, they felt uncomfortable to her as they were too tight in areas she normally kept loose to allow for the best manoeuvrability when drawing a bow. She checked herself once over in the mirror; her red hair contrasted with the blue of the gown, but not in a bad way. She decided she looked good enough and started out down the stairs ten minutes before she was to enter the Hall with the rest of the team.<p>

Rapunzel had spent more time than most of the other women in the Ravenclaw dormitories, which was saying something. She'd had to start a couple of hours early to brush and braid her hair for the event before changing into her gown while Pascal turned a more emerald shade of green for the occasion. She looked at herself quizzically in the mirror before heading for the Hall; she stood in a floor length purple gown that fitted her perfectly while her hair hung in its usual large braid but with the added addition of flowers tied in to the locks of golden hair. She looked beautiful, which was confirmed a minute later when all the Ravenclaw men turned and watched her leave, open mouthed as she passed.

Hiccup panicked as he changed, worrying his dress robes didn't suit him or that he was going to make an idiot of himself when he got in there. He'd had one bad moment when he'd stuck his metal leg through his trousers and felt a rip as it caught with the lining at the bottom, luckily he'd been able to fix it relatively well and the stitching was only slightly wonky. He looked himself over in the mirror, dressed in a dark green dress robe he looked surprisingly dashing and heads definitely turned to watch him as he left the Hufflepuff Common Room, although he didn't notice.

Jack had dressed quickly into his black dress robes, taken a single glance in the mirror to check he looked as sharp as he felt, and headed out, leaving his staff in his room for the night. He was still barefoot though, nothing would change that about him.

Hiccup and Rapunzel arrived first, joined by Mia Frost who had followed Rapunzel, and the three waited nervously between the bottom of the Grand Staircase and the entrance to the Great Hall for the rest of the team to arrive.

Next were Fred and his girlfriend Ashleigh who greeted them warmly enough, although for some reason the three felt an icy edge to their words, before standing arm's length apart as they waited. After them was Flynn and Merida, who had met one another on their way down and now joined the group, Merida standing awkwardly next to Hiccup and Flynn joining Rapunzel, pulling at the neck of his dress robe as if they were a little too small for him.

Finally, Jack appeared around the corner from the stairs, a minute before the champions were to enter into the Hall. As he appeared Hiccup turned a little pink around the cheeks while Merida and Rapunzel jokingly wolf whistled.

'Ah, good to see you've all made it in time,' Finnegan told the teams, assembled in little circles that kept a fair distance from one another, 'Well by my watch it's time for us to enter, so, Beauxbatons will enter first, followed by Durmstrang, then Hogwarts. How's that?'

The teams nodded in silent and nervous approval before aligning themselves into the right order. At Finnegan's signal the double doors opened and the three teams began to process into the Hall already filled with the rest of the students. As the Hogwarts team were last they received much of the attention as the students turned in their seats to watch the arrivals, and it was with a thankful heart that they all sat down at their table and the students lost attention as menus appeared in front of them.

The team was sat at their own circular table at the front of the Hall, Jack and Hiccup sat side by side as did Merida and Fred while Rapunzel and Flynn sat together with Mia on Rapunzel's side and Ashleigh on Flynn's. They all tucked into their meals which instantly appeared as they called their order. The four knew Grindl and the other elves would all be working extremely hard to accomplish such a trick and so had sent down extra Christmas presents as a thank you.

'Don't look now but Mulcaster's with one of the Beauxbatons girls,' Fred said, pointing to the Beauxbatons team as their main course left to be replaced with a selection of desserts.

'Oh God, how did he charm one of them?' Merida asked, craning her neck around to spot the head of Mulcaster, leaning in to one of the girls, before turning away in disgust.

'Maybe she thinks it's like the Princess and the Frog. She thinks if she goes out with him he'll turn into a real human being. He looks so much like a toad she might not tell the difference.'

Merida snorted into her large bowl of ice cream and was joined by Fred until the two were laughing hysterically into their bowls, watched angrily by Ashleigh who hadn't spoken so much as a word with Fred since they had sat down.

As soon as everyone had finished their meal, the lights dimmed and the tables began to move ponderously to the sides of the Hall.

'We're supposed to do the first dance?' Merida asked an equally nervous Hiccup as the other teams stood up and took up dancing positions, waiting for the music. As one the Hogwarts team stumbled up and joined them, taking their own awkward and clearly unlearned positions. Mulcaster smirked over to Hiccup and Merida, who both seemed ready to fall over before the music even began, as he held his own partner in a practiced stance.

Suddenly the music started up and the couples began to dance in lazy or stuttering circles. Fred and Ashleigh were holding each other at a distance, as if afraid to get too close, while Rapunzel and Flynn made awkward movements that at moments appeared graceful. Jack danced energetically around with his sister, swinging this way and that as if they were in a rave while Hiccup and Merida danced awfully, stumbling in and out of time with the music.

'OW! Hiccup, ye keep standin' on my feet.'

'Really? I don't feel anything.'

'That's because it's always yer metal foot genius. OW!'

Finally the song ended and various couples split off from the dance floor to get drinks or go outside. Hiccup and Merida were the first off, gasping in relief as they stepped away from the dance floor of doom.

'I'm goin' ta get a drink, what do ye want ta do?' Merida asked, indicating the drinks with her thumb.

'Do you want to go and check out the outside, I've heard they spruced it up a lot,' Hiccup replied as he followed her to get a pumpkin juice.

Rapunzel and Flynn sat at a table and shared the last few bowlfuls of ice cream with one another as they watched the dancers. Fred and Ashleigh left to go outside, without grabbing refreshments, and Jack and Mia stayed dancing, knocking other couples out of their way as they moved around the floor.

* * *

><p>Hiccup and Merida stepped outside the Hall and whistled at the sight that stood before them. The teachers had clearly gone all-out as a large chunk of the grounds in front of the castle had been transformed into a sprawling garden that sparkled with fairy lights that were, on closer inspection, actual fairies drifting between the plants. What really impressed them however, were the large, wild looking reindeer that wandered through the gardens. Hiccup and Merida had heard stories about North owning a herd of enchanted reindeer that he used to pull a flying sled but never had they believed it until now. The reindeer were currently surrounded by a group of first years who had been invited to the Ball and were taking turns riding the creatures; even without a saddle or supervision they were clearly safe, if the reindeer didn't want you to fall, you wouldn't.<p>

'I never would have believed it, if I hadn't seen it,' Merida confided to Hiccup as they passed the reindeer and went deeper into the garden.

'I know, where did you think he found them?' Hiccup asked, still watching the large creatures now behind them.

'I think ye've tamed enough wild animals for a few months Hiccup,' Merida joked, 'speaking of which, have you and Rapunzel found out anythin' more about the Wings?'

'No,' Hiccup scowled, 'none of Rapunzel's spells have worked on them and we're seriously contemplating trying to take the thing apart.'

'Ye think that'll help?' Merida asked sceptically.

'It'd make me feel better,' Hiccup told her, grinning and making her laugh.

'No! I've had it Fred, I'm done and we're finished!' A voice suddenly yelled from the clearing ahead of them, making them both freeze in their tracks before they both began to hurriedly go back the way they came. Too late though as Ashleigh Marsh stormed passed them before they had a chance to get away, giving them both an angry look before disappearing.

Merida and Hiccup looked at one another in confusion before walking quietly forward to peek into the next clearing. In it they saw Fred sitting on a stone bench, looking glumly and angrily down at the ground.

'Did they just break up?' Hiccup asked in a lowered voice.

'I guess so. It doesn't look like it could be anythin' else,' Merida whispered back, still looking around at the sullen Fred, 'Fred doesn't look too good. Maybe I should go talk ta him?'

'Yeah, you do that,' Hiccup agreed as he straightened up and began to back away, 'I'll go back to the dance and give you some privacy while you sort it out. Just, whatever you do, don't try to take advantage of a lonely man.'

'Hiccup!'

'Sorry, sorry. Too soon, I know,' Hiccup apologised as he disappeared around the bend.

Shaking her head in both an amused and affronted manner, Merida turned into the clearing and walked over to Fred.

'Well, that didn't look good,' she said by way of introduction as she sat beside him, startling Fred and making him jump before relaxing again when he saw it was her.

'God, you didn't hear that did you?' He asked in an apologetic voice.

'Just the final remarks, do ye want ta talk about it?'

'Not really. Honestly there's not much to say,' Fred replied, his head still hung low.

'Well why not give it a go,' Merida encouraged him, 'It might help ye feel better. I thought ye both were doin' great, what happened?'

'It wasn't anything recent, we've been growing apart for a while now, but I guess it really started to go downhill when I got picked out for the Tournament,' Fred told her after a minute's consideration, 'You remember that time just before the First Task when we did nothing but train together? She got angry at me for it because I wasn't spending enough time with her, or any to be truthful. I'm pretty much to blame for this.'

'Don't say that,' Merida tried to soothe, 'I'm sure it wasn't all yer fault. After all there had ta be a reason ye didn't want ta spend time with her. Oh God that makes me sound terrible. I actually really like Ashleigh, she's a great lass.'

'You're not helping,'

'Sorry,' Merida apologised guiltily. Leaning back in her seat and gathering her gown around her to more effectively keep out the cold; she tried to think of another topic to help lift the mood. 'Did ye hear the results for the England versus Brazil match yesterday?'

'Are you kidding? I was listening to the entire match on myâ€¦' Fred began eagerly before catching himself and laughing.

'What's so funny?' Merida asked suspiciously.

'Why is it, whenever we need to cheer one another up, we always go to quidditch. It wouldn't work for anyone else,' Fred told her before

breaking into laughter again.

'Well it did, didn't it?' Merida asked indignantly before cracking and joining in on his laughter.

* * *

><p>Rapunzel and Flynn sat at their table still watching the dancers. Jack and Mia had disappeared from view at some point and not reappeared but other strange couples kept them both entertained. They watched as Professor North and Toothiana sailed past, her giggling as his large beard tickled her, followed by Mansnoozie and Whittler who seemed to be dancing the tango even though the music wasn't right for it. Bunnymund, Maximus and Gobber weren't joining in on the dancing but were instead standing near Rapunzel and Flynn's table, sharing an unlabelled bottle that Bunnymund's family had sent in from Australia and growing steadily drunker from it.<p>

'So, I've been meaning to ask,' Flynn began steadily as they watched another couple bob away, 'am I going to get super strength in my hand or something? Because that would be awesome.'

'Nope, sorry,' Rapunzel laughed as Pascal busied himself by eating all the remaining fruit from the table.

'You know, you never explained to me how you could do that,' Flynn continued suggestively.

'It's nothing special really. My hair's just a little unusual is all,' Rapunzel explained after weighing Flynn's trustworthiness in her mind for a second or two.

'Nothing special? I've never heard of anyone doing what you could. How come you don't use it more often?' Flynn asked amiably.

'I don't want to attract the attention,' Rapunzel said truthfully, the fewer stories of a girl with healing hair going around, the less likely it would be for Gothel to find her. 'And I don't want people trying to destroy it or take it for themselves. You see, when people cut my hair the power in it fades and it turns brown.'

As she told him she reached back and lifted her braid to reveal a single short length of brown hair, the only hair she kept short in fact so it would be less obvious among their golden counterparts. 'I feel like I need to protect this gift, so one day I might be able to use it to its fullest extent. Does that make sense?'

'Yeah,' Flynn answered soberly, 'I'm surprised you've lasted all this time though. Everyone thinks you're a little weird for keeping your hair so long.'

'Thanks,' Rapunzel replied sarcastically, 'and speaking of not answering questions, you never told me about what you meant when you said you were a thief.'

'Oh, that's not really interesting,' Flynn said, waving his hand in a half-hearted gesture.

'I told you my story, now you have to tell me yours,' Rapunzel continued defiantly.

'Alright,' Flynn acknowledged, waving his hand in the air in defeat, 'If you must know, I started life in a muggle orphanage. We didn't have many books there and I would always read the same one, The Adventures of Flynn Ryder. I so wanted to be like him, rich, famous, all of that. So when I discovered my magical powers, Iâ€¦well I kind of went on a rampage. I left the orphanage and started using my magic to steal my fortune; I even changed my name to Flynn Ryder so I wouldn't get caught.'

'Wait, what is your real name then?' Rapunzel asked with confusion.

'You promise not to tell anyone?' Flynn asked to which Rapunzel nodded enthusiastically, 'Alright, my real name's Eugene Fitzherbert. Don't laugh.'

'I'm not laughing; I think it's a nice name.'

'Well, whatever you do, don't tell Fred. He'd never let it go,' Flynn warned which Rapunzel agreed to. 'Anyway, I did get caught eventually by Maximus and I was adopted by a magical family, the Ministry let me off on account of not knowing any better or something, I didn't really follow it back then.'

'Wait, Professor Maximus is the one who caught you?' Rapunzel asked incredulously as his story came to a close.

'Yeah, although I gave him the slip the first few times, and he's never forgiven me for it. That's why we act the way we do around each other. He retired afterwards and came to work here; you should have seen the look on his face when I appeared in my first Defence Against the Dark Arts class.'

Rapunzel would have said more but the song that had been playing ended, causing the few couples left dancing to leave the floor for drinks, and was replaced by the playing of a violin and flute in a more folkish song.

Entranced by the music she left the table and, before Flynn knew what was happening, she was dancing in the middle of the floor with everyone watching. She danced off to the edge and grabbed a first year girl who had stood shyly at the edge of the floor all night and pulled her into a spinning dance. She collected more people, grabbing them by the arm or the hand and pulling them in to join her, and soon the Hall rang with the music and the accompanying clapping from the dancers. Flynn stood up to watch the scene from a better angle and saw Rapunzel motion for him to join them.

He shook his head firmly, the first dance had been enough for him, but was suddenly pushed onto the floor by Maximus who brayed with laughter when Flynn gave him a dirty look as he was dragged in by another dancer. Much to his disbelief however, he quickly got into the dance and was soon spinning away with everyone else. Several times he and Rapunzel tried to become partners but were taken by another dancer before they could reach one another. Finally, when the song was nearly over, they made it to each other's arms and stood together, breathing heavily, as the song ended.

They stood perfectly still for just a moment as the music faded and

couples began to leave the floor, unwilling to leave one another. They broke apart eventually and returned to their seats, looking at one another nervously and in a different light.

'Well that's another unique gift you can add to your list,' Flynn said as they sat back down, trying to break the strange tension that had come between them.

'What's that?' Rapunzel asked as she stroked a now sleeping, and slightly fatter, Pascal.

'You're the only person who can manage to get me to dance and enjoy it.'

Rapunzel smiled happily at that, 'Thanks Flynn,' she said in a happy tone as magical snow began to fall lightly from the ceiling to mirror the weather outside.

* * *

><p>Hiccup trudged back through the fairy lit garden, passed the large reindeer, and was soon bathed in the lights of the Great Hall again. He would have gone back in if he hadn't seen and recognised a dark shape hiding in the shadows near the corner of the castle. Jack was using the light cover of snow on the ground to hand-make snowballs which he then threw underhanded above the hedges of the garden so they would fall, almost vertically, into the shrubbery. Occasionally one of these snowballs would be followed by a shriek and two figures staggering out from the hedge, their heads and shoulder covered in the snow, looking around for the thrower. Jack, however, had chosen his spot well as his black dress robes hid him almost perfectly from the sight of his unlucky victims in the shadow of the castle, the only possible give away being his white hair which they mistook for a patch of snow.<p>

'And what do you think you're doing?' He asked jokingly as he walked up to Jack.

'Just trying to spread a little Christmas cheer to the lovely couples of Hogwarts,' Jack joked in return as he threw his last snowball, driving out Mulcaster and his Beauxbatons girl who both ran back to the Hall with their arms above their heads. Sniggering, Jack turned to Hiccup.

'Where's Mia?' Hiccup asked curiously, looking around warily for the girl who, he was sure, would be willing to play a let's-ambush-Hiccup game, 'The last time I saw her, you were swinging her around the dance floor by her wrists.'

'That move's called The Knock-Out,' Jack laughed, 'because of all the innocent bystanders who get in the way. She's not here; we split up when she wanted to go with her friends to check out North's reindeer. Have you seen those things by the way?'

'Yeah, Merida and I passed them a while ago,' Hiccup replied, smirking slightly He wondered why conversations with Jack couldn't always be this easy, rather than ending in awkward pauses like they did more and more over the years.

'I'm kind of glad she's gone off with her friends though,' Jack

continued, 'Not that I don't want her around. It's just that she was so worried about me after the First Task, because of that snake you know. She's been checking up on me every thirty minutes for the past few weeks and it started to get a little annoying.'

'I'm sorry for that Jack,' Hiccup suddenly said guiltily, causing Jack to look at him in surprise.

'What for?'

'I should have known about the snake, it was a Snake of Colchis, one of them was the final line of defence the people of Colchis used to defend the Golden Fleece. The Bronze Bull was supposed to be a clue and I should have got it, but I didn't and you got hurt for it. I'm just sorry that you had to be hurt for my mistake.'

'Don't blame yourself for that Hiccup,' Jack said, reassuringly squeezing Hiccup's shoulder, 'without you we'd have never done as well in the task. Sure, Merida and Fred organised us, but you were the one to tell us how to beat the monsters and it was you that turned some of them to our side, I bet that earned us points.'

'Thanks Jack,' Hiccup smiled, resting his own hand briefly against Jack's before pulling it away again after realising what he was doing. 'Jack? Can I ask you something?' He asked nervously, his heart pounding in his chest.

'Sure, fire away,' Jack returned casually.

'Back in the library a couple of days ago, you brought up Merida and my exes. The thing is, even though you had a ton of fan girls in year four, I've never seen you in a relationship. And even with the Ball, every girl was asking you to go but you turned them down.'

'I told you, I was taking my sister,' Jack explained awkwardly, 'she wanted to go remember.' He had somehow moved closer to Hiccup without ever realising he'd stepped forward.

'Yeah, you said, but surely she would be allowed in anyway, she's a champion's sister. You could have probably taken a date as well, so why didn't you? Are you not interested in anyone, or is itâ€¦something else?' Hiccup's thoughts were racing faster now, although not nearly as fast as his heart, as he too realised how close he and Jack were now standing.

'Hiccup, Iâ€¦' Jack began before his words failed him and he stammered to a halt.

'Are youâ€¦?' Hiccup began in a whisper before words failed him too.

Suddenly they grabbed hold of one another, as a drowning man would grab a life preserver. Jack was pushed up against the wall, his and Hiccup's faces inches apart, brown-grey eyes staring into blue. One of Hiccup's hands was around his waist while the other was cupped around his neck and his own hands were curved around Hiccup's back and tangled in his messy brown hair. They stood together, pressed against the wall, unseen in the shadows, their foreheads touching ever so slightly so their fringes tangled softly together as they

looked at one another, barely blinking.

Their lips were so close to one another, not touching but so close that the feeling of each other's warm breath between them felt almost as if their lips had already met. Slowly, as if any sudden movement now would break the fragile moment, they moved closer to one another, Jack leaning down slightly as his eyes closed so his mouth would be more level with Hiccup's. As they were almost there, to the point that they couldn't tell whether their lips had touched or it had been a final breath between them, Jack felt something snap within him and he pushed Hiccup away.

'Jack, whatâ€|?' Hiccup began in an almost confused and definitely hurt tone.

'I'm sorry, Iâ€|I can't,' Jack stammered before turning and practically running back into the castle, avoiding the Hall and not stopping until he reached the Slytherin Common Room and his own bed, leaving Hiccup behind in the snow.

* * *

><p>That night, Merida and Fred sat, talking at the bench until midnight when it grew too cold for either of them to stay out. They both escorted each other back to the Common Room and disappeared, smiling, into their separate dormitories with a final goodnight.<p>

Rapunzel and Flynn stayed up until an hour later, sitting and occasionally dancing until much of the party had ended. They walked as far up the Grand Staircase together before separating for their Common Rooms, Rapunzel giving Flynn a goodnight kiss on the cheek.

Jack spent the night huddled under his duvet, unable to sleep as his thoughts tangled in his mind. Only until after three in the morning did his eyes finally close from exhaustion.

Hiccup walked down to Gobber's hut and sat with Toothless for half the night. Allowing the dragon to comfort him as he sat next to his warm side; stroking him on the head and between his wings in return for the heat and company he provided.

* * *

><p>Told you :)

**Don't hate me too badly, instead live in the pleasant knowledge that there'll be a small cameo from Professor Trelawney again next chapter :P **

Also, I would have released this last night but I forgot after watching the Dr Who anniversary episode (Fantastic by the way :D)

Until next time, thanks for the reviews and I hope you're enjoying the story (Okay maybe not that end bit but you know what I mean)

17. The Message

****The Message****

The sky and ground were filled with dark shapes; it was a frenzied battle. Well, not quite a battle, more like a feeding frenzy. The dementors did all they could to escape their hunters but, sadly, were not able to glide fast enough to escape the black horses for long. The Nightmares whinnied and cried in jubilation as they felt the sweet fear of the dementors, chasing each one down and, when they caught one, consuming them. It was a terrible sight to watch and the dark wizards and witches, as well as the other followers of the Council, including the rogue werewolves, stood in a large group underneath them, cringing as each dementor disappeared into the mouth of a Nightmare. Four figures, however, did not cringe at the gruesome sight above them.

Pitch Black reclined on a throne he had conjured with a wave of his wand, Gothel sat in another of her own creation, sipping at a drink and watching Mordu with a look of disgust as he sat on the grey earth, gnawing at the bones of an animal he'd caught while Gothel and Pitch weren't looking. The Red Death lay a few feet away from them, its scales blending with the bleak, rocky outcrop of land that served as the small territory for the last group of surviving dementors. Its new hive of dragons was nowhere to be seen as they were out at sea, hunting for the dragon's massive appetite.

'Do you really have to do that?' Gothel sneered at Mordu who didn't even turn his head from the carcass before him.

'**I'm not hindered by such a pathetic idea as table manners**,' Mordu responded, his large snout still buried in the animal's side.

'Is that what you tell yourself, because from here you look like a giant pig,' Gothel returned, causing Mordu to snarl angrily at her and begin a retort which was cut off by the pop of an apparating wizard who appeared, kneeling, before Pitch's throne.

'My lords,' he began.

'And lady,' Gothel corrected, accompanied by a snort of derision from Mordu.

'**Please, how many ladies have you heard of that lived in a squalid cave for three years?**'

'I could go back and redecorate it if you like, how about a bear-skin rug to start?' Gothel hissed back angrily.

'Fight amongst each other later, let us listen to what Mulcaster has to say,' Pitch interrupted before either could go any further.

'My lords, and ladies,' Mulcaster added quickly as Gothel raised an eyebrow at him, 'we have captured a Ministry official patrolling the area. What do you wish to do with her?'

'Bring her here,' Gothel commanded, 'I could do with a bit of light entertainment.'

Bowing to his masters, Mulcaster disappeared before reappearing a second later with a woman bound in ropes, who fell to the floor at Pitch's feet.

'What is her name?' Pitch asked as he used his wand to raise the prone woman to look him face to face.

'Gytha Malkin my lord,' Mulcaster answered with another bow while Malkin twisted around to give him a look of deepest contempt, 'she works for the Department for the Regulation and Control for Magical Creatures.'

'Working for dark wizards Mulcaster? I always knew you were slimy but this is pathetic,' she spat before Pitch twitched his wand and she was spun around to face him again.

'There's no need to speak with your former associate Miss Malkin. I'd much prefer it if you answered a few of my questions. Why are you here, for instance?'

'The Ministry keeps tabs on the dementors,' Gytha told him through gritted teeth while staring into his eyes without blinking, 'we patrol their territory to make sure they stay in it. Why are you here Black?'

'She's got strength in her, that's certain,' Gothel spoke up with amusement as she leaned forward in her chair.

'**We'll see how long she can keep it**,' Mordu growled as he watched the woman.

'To answer your question Miss Malkin, we are here for my Nightmares' sake,' Black said, flicking his wand to bend Malkin's back painfully backwards so she would look up to see the horrific frenzy above them, which Mulcaster was spending all his energy trying not to look at.

'You may return to the Ministry Mulcaster,' Black sighed as he saw his servant's discomfort, 'I'm sure they'll be missing you soon.'

'Thank you my lord,' Mulcaster said gratefully before disappearing with a pop as air rushed in to fill the gap he'd left.

'What are those things doing?' Malkin asked with a tinge of horror in her voice as she watched more dementors vanish, 'They can't be killing them? That's impossible, nothing but age can kill dementors.'

'Ah, well you see, that's not entirely true,' Pitch corrected as he released her back and let her fall forward, 'My Nightmares were created from the magic of the dementors, what they left behind in Azkaban at any rate. They're not killing them so much as, absorbing them, like drops of water coming together.'

'But, why?' Malkin asked, more sickened than ever.

'To grow stronger, I'll need my army to be as powerful as it can be if we are to conquer the Ministry. Incidentally, I was rather hoping a Ministry official would arrive soon.'

'Youâ€|?' Malkin asked in disbelief which Black laughed at.

'Oh, I knew the Ministry kept an eye on these pitiful creatures, it would only be a matter of time before you came to check up on them,' he told her, still laughing slightly, 'You see, I need some information on a very important matter. I have my own source keeping an eye on the situation of course but, unfortunately, they can only give me limited information. Which is where you come in, a Ministry perspective will help to fill in the gaps and answer a few important questions. Now, as I'm sure you will be less than willing to share what you know, I shall have to drag it out of you and then, when you are no longer useful, I shall feed you to my pet Red Death, Terror.'

'But don't worry,' he continued as he stood up from his throne and turned Malkin around by hand to watch something behind her, 'I'm going to show you something wonderful to think of first.'

The sky and surrounding lands were now empty except for a single spot where several nightmares had pinned down the last of the dementors and were tearing it apart.

'The dementors,' Black said, relishing each word, 'a species that has given such trouble to the Ministry, has just â€|_(the Nightmares ripped the dementor into even smaller pieces_) â€| become â€|_(the last shreds fell around the Nightmares_) â€|extinct â€| (_the final shred disappeared as a Nightmare bit down onto it)_.'

* * *

><p>Rapunzel woke with a start, her brow beaded with sweat as the memory of the dream lingered in her mind while the vapours of Professor Trelawney's many incense sticks hung around her like suffocating smoke. Luckily Professor Trelawney herself hadn't noticed her dozing off as she was facing away from Rapunzel and Merida's table to look at the crystal ball of someone else; apparently it wasn't predicting anything good for him.<p>

'Bad dream?' Merida asked, looking concerned as Rapunzel pulled herself together.

'Yeah, it was pretty vivid,' Rapunzel admitted as she rubbed the sleep out of her eyes. Not just vivid but unusual. Rapunzel had occasional nightmares of Pitch Black every now and then but never before had Gothel been in one with him, she'd never dreamt of Gothel before at all. Even stranger, she'd dreamt of Mordu as well and she hadn't given the Demon-Bear much thought since the middle of fourth year, and who was this Gytha Malkin person?

'It's the fumes; I fell asleep in here once and dreamt I was a slice of lemon. Nothing else happened, I just lay there for half an hour,' Merida explained which helped ease Rapunzel's thoughts. Of course it was the fumes; they were just bringing up old faces in her dreams, except she'd never seen a dragon like that before.

'My dears,' Professor Trelawney exclaimed in her usual tone as she appeared at their table, 'have you broken through the veil to see beyond the mortal realm? Miss Solaris I sense that you are close to breaking through the fabric of time to see into the other

side.'

'Are ye kiddin'? Rapunzel would never do anythin' ta fabric,' Merida muttered which made Rapunzel's mouth twitch traitorously as Trelawney looked deeply into her face.

'Sorryâ€¦uh, not yet Professor,' Rapunzel apologised, 'maybe a few more minutes looking into the ball might do it.'

'Yes, yes, you must take your time with this, but don't take too long or I shall never have the chance to teach you to hone your skills to be as accurate as mine,' Trelawney encouraged her before giving Merida a cursory glance and moving on to another table.

'_I shall never have the chance ta teach ye ta hone yer skills to be as accurate as mine_, ' Merida mimicked scathingly, 'I'm surprised she can see anythin' with her head so far up her own ass. Anyway, lookin' into that ball is what got ye sleepin' in the first place lass,' she chastised, giving the misty ball a contemptuous look, 'and I don't blame ye, it'd be more interestin' ta watch paint dry.'

'Why did you let me fall asleep anyway?' Rapunzel asked accusingly, 'you know I don't like missing lessons.'

'Except History of Magic,' Merida corrected slyly, 'and it's not like it matters. Trelawney's convinced ye this great seer in trainin', she'll pass ye whether ye do any good or not.'

'Still, why did you let me sleep?'

'I thought ye needed it. You and Hiccup have been workin' yerselves ta death every day with those bloody Wings. I'd offer ta look at it myself but if you two don't know how to work them then I've got no chance.'

'About that, I think the team needs to have a meeting to discuss what to do next with the Wings. I've tried every charm and Hiccup's looked over every rivet of the thing but we've found nothing, we need new ideas or we're just going to have to risk taking it apart,' Rapunzel explained, leaning in to the crystal ball in front of them slightly as Trelawney passed so their conversation would be less obvious for her to see.

'I doubt that'll end well,' Merida replied, resting her head on her hand as she looked into the ball.

'Are Hiccup and Jack still fighting?' Rapunzel asked, already suspecting the answer judging by the fact the two boys would no longer sit together in lessons or during meals with the house-elves in the Kitchens.

'Of course they are. I wish they'd tell us what happened, we might be able ta do somethin' about it then,' Merida complained.

'I think it started after the Yule Ball. They stopped spending as much time together, stopped talking, stopped doing anything together really.'

'Do ye have any idea what happened between them?' Merida asked, she'd been trying to think up a reason herself but couldn't come up with

anything that sounded plausible.

'I don't know, I was with Flynn all night and I didn't see them,' Rapunzel admitted.

'How is the dashing Prince Charming by the way?' Merida asked, smiling pleasantly.

'Will you stop, we spent one night at a dance and that's it,' Rapunzel whispered back, afraid someone would listen in, even though she'd cast the muffliato spell to keep their voices from being heard.

'Ye spent the whole night at a dance,' Merida corrected with a grin, 'Even I'd gone ta bed by the time ye both were finished.'

'Nothing happened and you can't talk. Hiccup told me you spent most of the night sitting in a romantically lit garden with Fred,' Rapunzel returned triumphantly, now the tables were turned.

'He'd just broken up with his girlfriend, I was comfortin' him,' Merida tried to explain, turning slightly red around the ears.

'I don't know, usually you go and play quidditch, not sit close together on a bench at night.'

'We didn't plan on it bein' night and it was cold, if yer goin' ta sit next ta someone outside in the cold yer goin' ta sit close ta keep warm,' Merida explained defensively. 'So when do ye want ta do the meetin'?' She continued, avoiding Rapunzel's eyes as she changed the subject.

'Tomorrow at the latest, we've only got a week until the next Task,' Rapunzel suggested, smirking slightly at Merida's avoidance before looking back into the depths of the crystal ball. She could never be sure, but for a brief moment she was certain she saw the image of Black standing over Gytha Malkin, barely visible in the fog of the crystal.

* * *

><p>Merida and Rapunzel spread the word to the rest of the team that they would meet tomorrow at the end of lessons in their usual training spot and that they had to discuss what to do about the Golden Wings. Merida found Hiccup at Gobber's hut, tending to Toothless who sidled over to Merida to get her to scratch his head when he saw her arrive.<p>

'Will Jack be there?' Hiccup asked after she had told him the plan.

'He's part of the team Hiccup, of course he'll be there,' Merida confirmed, rolling her eyes at all male stubbornness everywhere, 'and we need ye ta come. You and Rapunzel are the only ones who understand this sort of stuff.'

'I didn't say I wasn't coming, I just wanted to know if Jack was,' Hiccup replied huffily.

'I know it's none of my business what got ye both like this,' Merida said, 'but _please_ try ta fix it with him, for yer friendship if nothin' else.'

'I don't know if it's that simple Merida,' Hiccup sighed as he stroked Toothless around the ears, 'I'm not sure if there's a way to fix this. So, do you want a ride around the grounds on Toothless?'

'Do I ever say no,' Merida grinned as Hiccup got into the saddle and she followed suit, ignoring what he'd said before, after all it wasn't like he really meant it.

* * *

><p>The entire team arrived at the usual spot by around half-past four. Rapunzel had got there first, bringing the Golden Wings with her, and had created six chairs from roots and grass stalks for the team to sit in, resting the wings on a tree stump in the centre of the circle of chairs.<p>

Hiccup and Jack sat as far from one another as they could, studiously avoiding the others eyes. Hiccup was talking with Flynn about the size of their chocolate frog card collection while Merida, Jack and Rapunzel talked about the latest strange case Rapunzel had seen in the Hospital Wing, always appropriately gory for Merida and Jack's entertainment.

Fred was the last to arrive and, as he slumped down into his seat next to Jack, Rapunzel stood up and started to explain the situation.

'Okay, the problem we have is that neither Hiccup nor I have found a spell or method to find the secret that the Golden Wings are supposed to possess. We're going to need to think up something fast because we're running out of time so we were hoping you guys might have some ideas before we resort to our back-up plan.'

'What's the back-up plan?' Fred asked, eyeing the Wings in front of them.

'Hiccup and I take the Wings apart, risking destroying the message completely on the off chance that that's what we're supposed to do,' Rapunzel answered before sitting down.

That does seem pretty risky to me,' Jack said as he picked up the Wings in both hands and looked them over, moving the Wings this way and that in the hopes of finding some hidden words or instructions along its metal seams.

'That's the problem, it's risky but that might be the trick,' Hiccup replied, although addressing the rest of the group as if it had been one of them that asked rather than Jack, 'Rapunzel and I have been wondering, what if we're _supposed_ to dismantle it to find the clue, it'd be the last thing someone would expect andâ€|what the hell are you doing?'

His last words were addressed to Jack who was now floating the Wings on the cold winds funnelling from the top of his staff. 'Oh, so now you acknowledge my existence,' Jack replied sulkily, the Wings still

floating above his head. 'And why can't I do this? Wings are supposed to fly you know,' he continued, twirling his staff lightly to make the wings swoop over the heads of the group.

'_Comeâ€|_'

'Did you hear that?' Fred asked, looking around for the faint voice that had echoed around them for just a moment, 'You don't thinkâ€|?'

'Jack, do it again,' Merida encouraged while the others strained their ears to listen. Once again Jack made the Wings swoop around them and again they heard that same dim voice. They all looked at one another for a moment as realisation struck.

'All this time and you never thought to fly them around?' Flynn asked, near laughter as Hiccup and Rapunzel watched the Wings, looking mortified.

'I feel very embarrassed for ye right now,' Merida giggled as Jack floated the Wings in the centre and began to spin them around in the cold winds until a screeching voice suddenly came from them, causing the team to cover their ears slightly so they wouldn't be deafened.

'Come to us at the top of our mighty home,
We do not rest upon the ground,
We have taken one member's greatest treasure,
An hour you'll have to seek it out,
Past that time and don't bother,
It'll be ours forever.'

As the message ended Jack stopped the winds to let the Wings drop, but they didn't, instead they hung in mid-air and began to shudder. Soon the wings began to peel apart into six separate layers; all the same golden wings that looked like a dragonfly's with two straps dangling from the centre, going to each of the six and landing in their laps.

'Well, I guess we did take it apart at least,' Hiccup stated as they all stared at the wings.

'What was that about?' Merida asked incredulously, holding the wings in front of her to see that a line from the message had been etched along them, the same held true for the others, all holding a different line.

'I feel it would've been more ominous if they'd managed to rhyme,' Fred said disappointedly, 'although the scary screeching was a nice touch.'

'They didn't add the screeching in,' Hiccup told them as Flynn and Jack began to try on the wings, slinging the straps over their shoulders so the wings hung from their backs like a jetpack. 'I think the next Task is to do with Harpies.'

'I agree, it does sound like them,' Rapunzel said while the others looked confusedly at one another.

'Do you mind enlightening the rest of us?' Flynn asked sarcastically.

'Harpies are sentient creatures that live in their own cultivated woods; they sleep in trees rather than the ground which explains one verse. Every flock has a single primary tree that's grown to be far larger than any of the surrounding ones, that's what they'll mean by their "mighty home". They're also not really interested in human past times like the arts, which explains why they didn't bother to use rhymes in their message.'

'Okay, but how is this a challenge?' Merida asked uncertainly, sure there would be twist somewhere.

'When Rapunzel says the trees are big, she means really big,' Hiccup continued, 'the only reason muggles don't see them is because the Harpies have magic that keeps their forests hidden from them, and most wizards. The main tree would take ages to climb all the way, and it'd be full of all kinds of traps which will include Harpie guards that protect the place from intruders.'

'Doesn't seem like much of a problem then,' Merida said, grinning knowingly at Fred, Jack and Flynn who were sharing her look.

'How does that not seem like a problem?' Rapunzel asked, watching the four with confusion.

'Who says we have to climb the tree?' Jack asked, still smiling at the look of bewilderment on Hiccup and Rapunzel's faces.

'Oh, come on you two, we don't have to climb because we can fly,' Merida pointed out, followed by oh's of understanding from the two.

'I can fly Toothlessâ€¦' Hiccup said, realising what they were saying.

'And the rest of us can fly our brooms,' Flynn filled in after him.

'But wait, I don't have a broom to fly on,' Rapunzel reminded them, 'Do you think they'd let me borrow one of the school ones?'

'I can use the winds to fly around and you can borrow my broom Rapunzel,' Jack suggested, grinning along with the others as the plan began to form in their minds.

They stayed for another hour in the circle, perfecting a plan to get to the top of the tree as quickly as possible and arranging the new training sessions for the next week before splitting up and going about their separate ways. Merida and Rapunzel went to the Owlery to collect any letters that may have arrived for them, trying to look back at the departing figures of Fred and Flynn, who were heading for the Great Hall for an early dinner, without letting the other know they were doing it. Jack stayed behind for a moment before following Hiccup down the path to Gobber's hut and caught up to him before the

chimney of Gobber's forge came into view.

'Hiccup, I want to talk to you,' he said as he caught up.

'How nice for you,' Hiccup returned sarcastically before continuing down the hill.

'Please, just stop and hear me out okay?' Jack said, grabbing Hiccup's shoulder to stop the boy's descent down the path.

Hiccup sighed before turning to look at Jack, an arm's length away from him. 'Well?' He asked when Jack didn't seem ready to start.

'I just wanted to say sorry forâ€|for leading you on, is all,' he told Hiccup apologetically.

'Leading me on? Is that what you call nearly snogging me before pushing me away and making that night one of the worst in my life?' Hiccup asked, crossing his arms and looking angrily at Jack.

'I don't know why I did that,' Jack tried to explain desperately, 'something in me just snapped. I never meant to hurt you, it's justâ€|'

'Just that you don't feel the same way about guys that I do,' Hiccup answered sceptically, 'Well I'm sorry that I put you in such an awkward position, although you looked like you were enjoying it at the time. Don't worry; I'll leave you alone so there's _no_ chance of that happening again.'

'Hiccup, I didn'tâ€|' Jack began to say, reaching out for the young Berkian unsurely before Hiccup suddenly turned his back on him.

'Forget it Jack,' Hiccup said over his shoulder as he walked away, wiping at his eyes as he left Jack standing alone.

* * *

><p>'Well, whatever's goin' on between those two has definitely got worse,' Merida said to Rapunzel as they met in the Entrance Hall the next morning on their way to breakfast, 'I just saw Jack looking miserable in the courtyard and I haven't seen Hiccup since yesterday.'<p>

'I have, he was flying into the Forbidden Forest with Toothless last night,' Rapunzel told her as they passed into the Great Hall and grabbed some food from the tables before going to sit at the Grand Staircase to talk.

'Do ye think somethin' happened between them?' Merida asked curiously.

'Merida, we know something happened to them or they wouldn't be acting strange.'

'No, I mean _happened_ happened. You knowâ€|' Merida tried to clarify, nodding as Rapunzel looked at her in a knowing way.

'Something _could_ have happened at the dance between them,' Rapunzel said in a concerned voice before stopping as her eye caught something.

'Do ye think there's anythin' we could do ta find out? Rapunzel?' Merida asked, looking around at Rapunzel who was holding up a copy of the Daily Prophet that had been dropped on the steps and was reading a small article on the page that had been left open.

****Ministry denies rumours over disappearance of Gytha Malkin****

Gytha Malkin, head of the Dementor Restraint Division in the Department for the Regulation and Control for Magical Creatures, has been reported missing today after she failed to return from a routine patrol of the dementor's last known territory yesterday. Reliable sources confirm the concern the Ministry feels for Ms Malkin's safety due to her dangerous proximity to the dementors at the time of her disappearance. The Ministry however, denied any such concerns and assure the public that they are sure Ms Malkin is in no danger and go on to deny further rumours that the dementors themselves have disappeared along with the, as yet, unfound Ministry official. Colleagues of Gytha, who wish to remain anonymous, told the Prophetâ€|

Rapunzel's hands shook slightly as she held the paper in her lap. Gytha Malkin, the woman Rapunzel had dreamt of in amazingly accurate detail, had gone missing yesterday, the day after Rapunzel had dreamt of her.

* * *

><p>This is a bit more of a filler chapter, I know
:P

****And oh dear, more Hijack drama, what will it hold in store for the Second Task? D:****

****Also, yes, there seems to be a pattern developing in the Task themes. I can only apologise again for my lack of an imagination
:p****

****Oh well, I hope you enjoyed the chapter and thanks again for the amazing reviews :)****

18. The Second Task

****The Second Task****

The night before the Second Task, Merida, Hiccup Jack and Rapunzel had strange dreams.

Merida dreamt of climbing the Harpies' tree, which bared a striking resemblance to the olive tree from the First Task. To her it seemed to have no beginning or end, it was just a single stretch of gigantic bark rising forever into the sky with no end in sight. She looked around her for the others as she pulled herself onto another branch and saw only Harpies, except these Harpies were winged bears who watched her with black, unreadable eyes.

'_What do you want from me?' _She asked, calling across the tree's expanse to those blank animal faces. The bears made no answer; instead they burst into blue fire which engulfed the entire tree in an instant beneath Merida's hands, disappearing into ash. She fell, screaming in shock, as above her the bears floated above her, unseen within the balls of blue flame.

* * *

><p>Hiccup dreamt of the Forbidden Forest again. In some ways the dream was always the same and in others it was always different; he was always in the forest but he never took the same path. In the dream he was wearing his usual Viking furs, even with his mother's helmet, he even dreamt he had his metal leg when in every other dream he still had both intact. Tonight he wandered through the forest aimlessly, crossing its denizens as he did, he believed he had now met and bonded with every one of them. Some slept, some hunted, and he walked on, unseen but felt by them in the same way that low music can be felt. There was a new difference in this dream, as he walked near the edge of the forest he looked out to the Black Lake between the trees and saw a shimmer. It jarred with the rest of this all too realistic dream world, it didn't belong and he couldn't see it properly because of that, but no matter how hard he looked he couldn't remember if he had ever seen anything else when he awoke.<p>

* * *

><p>Rapunzel dreamt of Pitch Black again. He and the rest of the dark Council, or whatever she dreamed their name was, were no longer in the same bleak landscape they had been when she'd first dreamt of them in Divination. Now they were sitting inside somewhere, a large cave by the look of it, she could tell it was large as the giant dragon Terror lay in the back, but a well furbished one. Gothel reclined on a cushy sofa, reading a copy of the Daily Prophet while Mordu slept on the ground in what looked like a rug of multiple deer skins; by the look of it Gothel was passing the time until Mordu woke up and discovered she'd placed a dog bowl in front of his snout with MORDU written along the side.

Pitch Black was dictating to the wizard she knew to be Mulcaster's father, she'd seen him collecting Mulcaster at Platform 9 ^¾ plenty of times. '_As long as you can slip them through the entrance to the Ministry, Craven, then they can do the rest. They'll seek out their targets and ensure our success. Do not fail me.'_

'_Of course not my lord,' _Mulcaster whimpers swiftly before disappearing with a loud enough pop that Rapunzel awoke.

* * *

><p>Jack dreamt he was with Hiccup. They were lying together on a flat stretch of beach that went on for miles in all direction, an inky black sea washing peacefully up and down that just tickled the soles of their bare feet. They were both wearing the same dress robes they had on at the Yule Ball except with slight alterations. Hiccup's was lower cut so part of his chest could be seen before the neck lining cut it off while Jack's had added on the blue hood from his favourite hoodie. They lay on the sand, their hands held together as

they watched one another. Jack didn't know how long they stayed that way for, it felt like a blissful eternity, but suddenly he realised he and Hiccup were standing apart, their hands now at their sides. He reached out to Hiccup but found the distance between them was too great, he looked down and saw that the black sea had somehow snaked between them, leaving them on separated islands of sand. He looked up and saw Hiccup was now in the distant horizon as the sea between them grew into a raging maelstrom, but it wasn't a sea, he now realised, it was black sand that twisted and churned between him and Hiccup. He tried to call to Hiccup but his voice couldn't be heard over the roaring of the sand and suddenly Jack realised the beach he'd been standing on was also made from black sand, leaving him in a shifting nightmare, and then the sands between him and Hiccup, who was barely visible in the entirely black world, reared up in a wave and crashed down onto him, waking him with a gasp as he desperately sucked air into his lungs.<p>

* * *

><p>Hiccup had been right, it was a big tree. On the day of the Second Task everyone had, at some point in the morning, looked out onto the grounds and seen it at the other end of the lake, at the same spot Hiccup had seen the shimmer in his dream. Even at such a distance it towered over the castle, the leaves at its top seeming to touch the clouds. Its bark was made from a dark red wood and was covered in twisting brambles that gave the entire thing an oddly blurred look, as if the giant tree wasn't entirely there.

'How the hell did they bring that thing in?' Merida asked as she and the rest of the team walked down the grounds to it, followed by the large crowd of spectators eager to get a good seat. All of them were carrying their brooms except Jack who'd given his to Rapunzel and Hiccup who was walking beside Toothless, who looked curiously up at the tree along with the others.

'You'd think we'd have heard something,' Fred agreed as the large branches that covered the tree creaked loudly.

'I can't see any Harpies flying around,' Rapunzel added, looking up as the shadow of the leaves fell on them, 'they must be waiting inside the tree until the Task starts.'

'Now that's a comforting thought,' Hiccup joked as watched the leaves of the tree sway in the wind.

'We'll be fine, they'll run screaming for the hills when we've finished with them,' Jack said confidently, although his voice had a slight quaver to it, the memory of his dream still lingering in the back of his mind.

They arrived then at the spectators seats and headed straight for the long table set up in front of it where the five judges sat and the other teams waited. Harry and North smiled at them as they approached while Mycroft and Madame Maxime gave them curt nods. Finnegan cheered when he saw them, 'And here comes the most surprising team of all. I'm glad ta see you've all brought your wings; keep them tied to your backs until the task is over. Hurry up now; we're all eager to see what you've all got in store for us this time.'

Obeying his instruction the three teams took their separate Golden

Wings, split into six separate pieces for each member, and tied them to their backs. As they fell into place the wings shrunk and furled together so they only covered a small part of the back, allowing for easy movement.

'Get yourselves ready,' Finnegan advised as the last stragglers arrived to take their seats, 'on my whistle you can all start climbing the tree.' At his words the Durmstrang team mounted their matching broomsticks, Dmitri Krum in the lead, the Hogwarts team followed suit while the Beauxbatons team did nothing and waited patiently.

At the count of three, Finnegan blew his whistle and the teams rocketed into the sky, completely forgetting one another as they soared up past the first branches of the tree. Suddenly the air was full of the sound of nails screeching on chalk, looking up the team saw it was coming from a large mass of Harpies appearing out from every hidden crevice in their tree, screeching as they dived at them. They looked like people, but were covered from head to foot in matted, mangy feathers which were most prominent on their arms and legs where they became wings. The Harpies' faces were terrifying, bloodshot eyes stared out at them above a mouth full of yellow and surprisingly sharp teeth. They had dangerous looking talons at the end of each limb, wickedly curved and as sharp as an eagle's.

'Stay together,' Merida yelled, instinctively pulling out her wand as the others did. It was to no avail, however, as she was too late and the Harpy swarm were on them, driving them away from each other as the team were forced to dodge and weave out of the way.

Hiccup and Toothless reacted instantly; diving back down at a faster rate than the Harpies behind them could follow before swooping around to race back after them, shooting combined flames to scatter their ranks. As the Harpies fled others attacked from all sides, trying to knock Hiccup off from Toothless and scratching at the dragon's hide, although causing little damage. Toothless growled and snapped at the legs of a few that had been pulling at Hiccup, while the Berkian stunned others who were caught by their sisters, before flapping his wings and shooting them forward out of the melee and back up the tree.

Fred and Merida were using their knowledge as beaters to knock out as many of the Harpies as they could manage, using their wands to conjure heavy balls in the air before sending them flying into the flock as well as combining their own stunning spells. They had to use all of their manoeuvrability to keep out of the creatures' talons and prevent themselves from falling off their brooms and there were a few near misses that were only saved when they came to one another's rescue. A Harpy managed to graze Fred's side and he felt himself tipping of the broom with the force of the impact and was only saved by Merida who swooped beneath him and grabbed his side to stabilise him while he regained his balance. He saved her a minute later with a stunning spell to a particularly ferocious looking Harpy who had nearly knocked Merida out from behind.

Hiccup and Toothless swerved past them, followed by a large pack of Harpies. Rapunzel and Flynn passed them a minute later in a blur, Rapunzel using her levitating spell to confuse and destabilise the Harpies, making them perfect targets for Flynn who shot sleeping and stunning spells at them. The battle continued like this for some

time, the team forced to weave and duck around Harpies as they hit back at the never thinning flock.

Jack was causing real trouble for the Harpies with his wind controlling powers. Harpies themselves use a form of wind magic to keep airborne and Jack's icy gusts were making them spin off or lose control completely. He added extra salt to the wound by spinning his staff and firing ice spells at them indiscriminately, freezing them in mid-air and forcing their brethren to lift their weighed down bodies to safety. Then again, their numbers were making up for it. More began to crowd around him and soon Jack wasn't able to destabilise enough of them and was forced to fly out of the scrum and into clearer air to get his bearings.

'Jack! Up here!' Rapunzel's voice called to him. Looking around Jack saw Rapunzel standing on one of the tree's branches above him, keeping a group of Harpies at bay as they tried to knock her off. He looked back and saw an even larger group flying for him and, without making a conscious decision, he strengthened the frigid winds around him and shot up to the branch. He landed on it next to Rapunzel and swung his staff around to create a wall of thin ice around them which expanded and suddenly popped like a bubble, knocking back the Harpies in a powerful, icy shockwave.

'Quickly, get inside,' Rapunzel encouraged as she and Jack hurried across the branch and went through one of the hidden alcoves that the Harpies had emerged from.

When inside Jack realised he'd been wrong to think of it as an alcove, inside the tree the entrance opened up to what looked like a large circular room. It looked as if the tree had grown naturally to be like this and Jack saw that the entire thing split off several times into wide corridors that were big enough to fit several men at once, some passages going straight along, some down and some up. The rest of the team were lying inside the circular hollow, their brooms in a pile next to them, and were panting with fatigue as Jack was.

'Won't they follow us in?' Jack huffed as he looked warily at the entrance.

'None of them have gone back in since we started, they take their injured to a point at the base but they ignore these chambers that are closer to hand. I don't think they're going to use these places again until the task is over. That's why I thought we could hide here for a while to figure out a new plan,' Rapunzel explained as she and Jack slumped down with the others.

'How much longer do we have anyway?' Flynn asked as he slumped back against the tree wall while Rapunzel began to tend to the scratches along his face.

'Thirty minutes,' Fred answered dejectedly as he checked his watch.

'We were out there for half an hour!' Merida yelled in shock, 'How far up are we?'

'Less than half way by the looks of it,' Hiccup answered as he looked out the entrance, Toothless by his side to guard against any

Harpies.

'Brilliant!' Fred exclaimed, 'Just Brilliant! How are we going to manage to get past that lot?'

'Maybe we shouldn't,' Rapunzel suggested as she began to heal Jack's arm which had a nasty cut along one side that he hadn't noticed, Hiccup winced as she pulled back Jack's robe to reveal the wound, 'Maybe we should try to climb the inside of the tree.'

'This place will be full of traps,' Hiccup reminded her, 'we'll be in more danger inside here than out there, at least we know what's coming in the air.'

'Yeah, but it's taking too long to get past that lot,' Jack stated as he pulled his robe back over his newly healed shoulder, 'I say we try the tree.'

Hiccup scowled at this but said nothing, instead choosing to stroke the top of Toothless' head. 'I say we give it a vote,' Fred said, standing up in the awkward silence, 'I vote the tree for now. If we don't go fast enough, we'll try the skies again.'

The others nodded and voted the same way, even Hiccup grudgingly agreed to the plan. They all got to their feet and picked one of the passages going up, mounting their brooms, dragon and winds they set off and sped up the tunnel which turned sharply to the right as it ascended, following the curve of the tree.

It took only a few minutes of flying before thorny vines sprang out at them all, grabbing them and their brooms. Toothless spurted flames at the thorns to no effect and soon he and Hiccup were as tangled as the rest. The thorny vines began to constrict, sending their sharp points to poke painfully into the team's bodies, and began to drag them all into the wall where they disappeared into dark cracks in the bark. The team struggled desperately as they were pulled ever closer to the dark wall, Rapunzel twisted and turned until her hand was just touching the edge of her right pocket where she felt the very tip of her wand. Slowly she pulled it out into her tightly clutching hand, shielding it from the vines until its handle finally fitted into her palm.

'_Lumos Solem_!' She cried and a bright flash of white light erupted from her wand, causing the vines to make a strange rumbling shriek and let go of her and Jack's Nimbus instantly before shrinking back into the safety of the wall. 'Cover your eyes!' She ordered as she pointed her wand to the rest of the team, whose vines had almost dragged them into the bark of the tree, but instantly let go the minute her wand light touched them. The team fell to the floor with their brooms; gasping deep lungful's of breath while Toothless shook himself angrily and Hiccup patted and calmed him.

'How did ye know what ta do?' Merida asked in awe as she and the rest of the team picked up their brooms.

'I thought they looked pretty similar to the devil's snare Professor Bunnymund showed us a few years ago,' Rapunzel explained, 'Their weakness is light so I kind of hoped the vine's was too.'

'Well done Rapunzel,' Jack congratulated as he gulped in fresh air,

'I take back my vote from before. Hiccup was right; at least we know what we're facing outside.'

'Then we should get to the next entrance and make up our next move there, how much time do we have left by the way?' Flynn asked as the others nodded in agreement to Jack.

'I don't know. Those bloody roots broke my watch!' Fred complained angrily as they set off, on foot this time, up the passage of the tree.

Finding another entrance was easier said than done. After the roots, the team were forced to wind their way through the ever more confusing maze that was the inside of the tree. They were attacked by no more thorns but instead had to work their way through several passages that spat poison when they walked in, released a number of sharp looking chestnuts the size of footballs from above or constrict around them, barely giving them enough time to escape before they closed completely. Finally a light ahead signalled another entrance and the team sighed with relief.

'Sunlight!' Merida cried happily, 'Oh, I've missed ye!'

'We can't rest,' Flynn reminded her as he leaned on his broom handle, 'We don't know how much time we have so we've got to make up a plan now.'

'Anybody got any ideas?' Hiccup asked as Toothless lay down tiredly at his feet and curled up for some rest.

'We need to be able to ram through them,' Jack said as he looked out the entrance at the circling Harpy patrols. 'If we can stop them swarming us then we'll be able to get to the top with ease.'

'Do you know of any way we can shoot past them like that?' Rapunzel asked hopefully.

'Nope.'

While the conversation was going on Merida stood near the entrance, watching as the Harpies circled around in close groups. 'Shoot,' she said to herself thoughtfully before it suddenly hit her. 'Hey guys,' she said, turning to the group, 'I've got an idea.'

* * *

><p>Jack, Flynn and Fred shot out from the tree, riding their brooms at their fastest speeds. Immediately the Harpy patrols closed in to surround them while the three boys swerved and swooped in an ever tightening circle as the Harpies surrounded them on all sides.<p>

As they passed by one another, when enough Harpies had come into close distance, the trio nodded to one another before digging into their robes and flinging out the contents into the middle between them. Next they pointed their wands and hit the bundle with three separate stunning spells.

The effect was instantaneous; the bundle of Weasley's Fireworks Fred had got from his father's joke shop exploded into a thousand multiplying sparks, the stunning spells adding to their own magic.

The Harpies were forced to thin out as they tried to escape the expanding ball of sparks and flames and that gave the team the opening they needed.

Hiccup and Toothless flashed out from the tree next, followed closely by the others who were in a tight formation behind him, which Jack, Flynn and Fred joined as the Harpies tried to regroup themselves. As soon as they were all in place Toothless shot out a ball of flame which Hiccup caught and expanded with a spell. The fire remained where it was in front of the team and began to expand around them to become a flaming arrowhead, renewed by occasional blasts from Toothless, and preventing any Harpy getting close enough to attack, at least from the front.

The Harpies screeched in triumph as they caught up with the back of the formation where Flynn, Fred, Merida and Rapunzel were all shooting spells to keep them back, but not fast enough to keep the main bulk away.

This was where Jack came in. He flew up to and landed behind Hiccup on Toothless, this had needed some persuading but eventually the two agreed when they were reminded their place in the Tournament was at stake, and perched on the back of the dragon just before it became a tail. He spun his staff around in a complicated pattern and the Harpies, who had come too close to the back, suddenly found themselves whipped up in swirling icy winds that surrounded the team left uncovered by Hiccup and Toothless' flames. The combined display of a fiery arrowhead and a spinning vortex of icy wind behind it was enough to scatter the remaining Harpies who flew back down to lower levels.

They blazed up through the air like a comet, scattering Harpies as they went up higher and higher. Soon they began to notice the air thinning slightly and suddenly they blazed through the leaves of the tree until they were at the top, burning leaves and branches scattering around them as their spells ended and they spread out and landed to look at the surrounding.

The top of the great tree was surprising. The branches at its very top seemed to have merged together before they bent away to hang over the side, the effect of this was a nearly flat circular stage made from the boughs of multiple branches. In the middle were three figures. One was a Harpy who seemed to be standing guard, unlike the others she held herself with an almost regal stance while her feathers seemed to be slightly better groomed, although there are pigeons in London better groomed than the Harpies. Next to her was a boy of around fourteen who was covered in the same kind of thorny bark the rest of the tree was made from, in fact, it seemed as if he was becoming part of the tree. Besides him wasâ€¦

'Mia!' Jack yelled before sprinting off towards his sister who was also covered in the bark of the tree.

'Jack no! That's the Matriarch, she can control theâ€¦' Hiccup yelled after him as he and Toothless sped off after the Harpy, trying to keep her away from Jack. He was cut off, however, when the Matriarch swept her winged arm to the side and branches snapped out from the tree and threw them both off the side and back down into the leaves beneath them.

Jack by this time had got to Mia and was pulling desperately at the bark that covered her, freezing the wood with his staff so it shattered as he pulled with his free hand. He couldn't free her in enough time, though, as a talon grabbed him by the shoulder and another gripped onto his head.

'Sorry,' the Matriarch whispered sinisterly to him as he struggled to break free, 'Time's up!'

She threw him back to the rest of the team and, with a flick of her clawed hand, raised a wall of thorns to block the spells they all fired at her. As the roots settled back into place she cackled cruelly and slammed her palm into the flat stage, creating a ripple of branches that became a large wave which rolled out at them with incredible speed. They were all knocked off the side by the force of the wave, barely conscious from the blow. Jack's last sight was of Mia still trapped as darkness descended around him.

* * *

><p>Mia.

'Mia,' Jack called out as he woke, raising his head so quickly from the ground that it smacked into Hiccup's worried face.

'Jack it's alright,' Hiccup reassured him in a whisper when they'd shaken off the bash, holding onto Jack's arm in a tight grip to stop him rushing off.

'Mia, that thing still has her. Oh God, I should have just listened to you instead of going through that tree, I should have noticed she wasn't here.'

'No, it's alright. Mia's not really taken; she volunteered to be our treasure last night. The Matriarch brought them both down after us,' Hiccup explained as Jack sat up, although staying close to Hiccup. He saw the rest of the team standing to one side as Madam Pomfrey fussed over their scratches. The Golden Wings lay in a crumbled pile of twisted metal in front of the team, their purpose served. Mia was standing with them to Jack's relief while the Matriarch was talking with the judges, he hadn't realised before but she stood at least a foot taller than any of them.

'What happened?' He asked as Hiccup helped pull him up while Toothless supported him on the other side.

'We ran out of time,' Hiccup explained, 'The hour was up when we got to the top so the Matriarch had to throw us off, otherwise she'd have let us take Mia without interfering.'

'She could have killed us, knocking us off the tree like that,' Fred fumed as they got closer to the team. Jack pulled Mia into a strong embrace which the girl complained and struggled from although without much success.

'No she couldn't, the wings were designed to keep us and anyone we were holding onto from falling too fast. We just drifted down like leaves,' Rapunzel reminded him.

'Good thing too, because Toothless was knocked out,' Hiccup stated

with a hint of worry as he looked down at the dragon who didn't seem any the worse for it as he was currently jumping around the rest of the group.

'Ladies and Gentlemen!' Finnegan's voice boomed out over them as the judges and Matriarch finished their discussion, 'After our conference with the Harpy Matriarch the judges have made their decisions.'

'Firstly, the Beauxbatons team have been awarded the most points as they were the only team successful in retrieving their treasure. We are awarding them fifty points!'

A large wave of cheering and clapping erupted from the Beauxbatons supporters which died down as Finnegan continued.

'The Durmstrang team proved unable to complete the Task as they were not able to retrieve their treasure within the time period. We are awarding them thirty points!'

A loud clapping from the Durmstrang supporters this time. For the first time, Jack noticed the fourteen year old boy standing next to Dmitri Krum, the similar jaw line and nose confirmed to him that Krum had also had a sibling for a treasure.

'And finally,' Finnegan continued, dropping his magically enhanced voice for effect, 'the Hogwarts team was also unable to complete the task. However, after discussing the matter with the Matriarch, who informed us they made it to the top just as time ran out, and seeing the spectacular final tactic the team used, the judges have decided to award the Hogwarts team forty points!'

The loudest cheering of all followed this announcement and the team felt the wave of sound hit them as they stared at the judges. Forty points meant they were in second place behind Beauxbatons, they could still win this.

'Now, please, the judges will take a moment to inform the teams of their final task before releasing them to join you in your celebrations,' Finnegan finished as the crowd dispersed and left for the castle to prepare for the celebration party. Meanwhile the judges were gathering the teams together to walk them towards the quidditch pitch; the Hogwarts team ended up walking besides the Durmstrangs.

'Those Beauxbatons played underhanded,' Krum muttered to them as they walked.

'What do ye mean?' Merida asked with confusion, she'd never really held a long conversation with any of the Durmstrangs. She knew of their old history of learning Dark Arts under their previous headmaster, but apparently Elias Mycroft had been turning the school around since his appointment which made it much harder for her to trust or distrust the opposing team.

'They waited on the ground while we distracted the Harpies,' Krum explained in an annoyed voice, 'they went up sneaking around the outside of the tree while we all did the real work! By the way, we were amazed by your spells, that was impressive. We'd still not got half way but you managed to blast your way through, it's a true shame

you ran out of time.'

'Uh, thanks,' Jack said awkwardly as they arrived in the quidditch pitch where he nearly fell into the Third Task if it hadn't been for Fred putting his arm out to stop Jack going any further.

'What have they done to the pitch?' Flynn asked in horror, accompanied by Merida, Jack and Fred who were equally appalled.

Much of the pitch had barely been changed except for a massive hole dug into the soil in the centre of the field. It was large enough to fit all three teams in at once and descended gradually as a tunnel into a dark underworld. It was so dark down there that none of the teams were able to see any further down the tunnel than three feet after the entrance.

'Can any of the teams guess as to what this is?' Finnegan asked excitedly as he stood next to the hole.

'Madam Hooch's worst nightmare,' Merida suggested under her breath which made the others laugh.

'Tunnels,' one of the Beauxbatons team suggested loudly, covering the Hogwarts team's sniggering.

'Close enough,' Finnegan cheered. 'What we have here for your Third Task is an underground maze, or more accurately, a labyrinth. To complete the Third Task you must travel through the maze, fighting off any dangers we send your way, and reach the end at the other side.'

'How will we know when we do that?' Rapunzel asked curiously while the others looked interestedly down into the tunnel.

'Ah, well that's simple Miss Solaris. The finishing area to the maze is the only other section, aside from this entrance, that's above ground. It's hidden outside of the school's grounds so you lot won't be able to find it before the day of the Task, not that I'm saying you'd cheat of course.'

'Now,' said Harry, stepping around Finnegan, 'the date of the Task will be a week after your final exams which gives you all plenty of breathing room to revise for your end of year exams (He smiled as Jack and Merida gave a small groan). That's all for now so you can all head off, I'm sure your schools are just aching to celebrate with you.'

The Hogwarts team trudged back to the castle wearily after they were dismissed. It had been a tiring hour and they still had their own house celebrations to get through, it was turning out to be a long day.

* * *

><p>Sorry this chapter took so long, I've been a little swamped with homework so I've had to write this in short windows.

I hope you guys enjoyed the chapter, still no Hijack (What can I say, I enjoy your suffering mwahaha! :P)

****I'll try to release the next chapter as soon as I can, it's gonna get good :D ****

19. The Third Task

****The Third Task****

The mood at Hogwarts as they entered June became both excited and panicked. Excited because everyone was looking forward to the Third Task, which would take place two days before the end of term. Panicked for the team as they had their exams to pass, this was especially important for the four because it was their OWL year. The team had been forced to postpone any further training sessions as they all began revising for their exams, the final one ending a week before the Task.

During that week the team practised hexes, or in Rapunzel's case offensive charms, in every available moment. They felt more comfortable about this task, they'd already battled through hordes of monsters to get to this point, and at least now they'd got most of their school work out the way. The teachers even allowed them to sneak off during class to train, some of them anyway. While Mansnoozie and Toothiana were happy for them to miss classes, Bunnymund, Maximus and Whittler wouldn't have let them go if they were being dragged by several Bronze Bulls.

'There's no way we're goin' ta be taken surprise of this time,' Merida had gloated as she used the impediment jinx to freeze a bee in mid-air as it drifted lazily into the classroom they were working in.

* * *

><p>Lunch was a hectic affair on the day of the Third Task. Everybody was eating quickly and talking noisily, hoping to go as early as possible to get good seats. The team sat on their separate tables, their nerves returning with a vengeance, until the heads of house gathered them together quietly at the top of the Hall.<p>

'What's going on Professor?' Rapunzel asked Mansnoozie, 'I didn't think the task was for another hour.'

Golden images flashed above Mansnoozie's head but, even with five year experience, the team couldn't work out the meaning of the images.

'Your families have been invited to watch the Third Task,' Toothiana told them cheerily, 'this is just your time to say hi.'

'Off ye pop, don't keep them waitin'' Whittler added as she hurried them in through the door that the team had entered after their choosing.

Inside the room was full of people; the families of all three teams were standing around in the room, the Beauxbatons families already talking to their team while the Durmstrang families were still waiting. The Hogwarts team's families were waiting happily at the back and came to greet them when the six entered.

'If it isn't our little champions,' Fergus boomed as the two groups met, pulling Merida into a tight hug. Jack's mother and Stoic followed suit and pulled their own sons into strong hugs while Rapunzel's parents hugged her at the same time.

'Don't think Gobber hasn't been tellin' me about all yer successes,' Stoic beamed happily, 'and ta think, six years ago I still thought ye were a clumsy danger ta yerself and everyone around ye. Now look at ye, tamin' Manticores and Hydras!'

'We've had a lovely time exploring your school,' Rapunzel's mother told her as she scratched Pascal under his scaly chin. 'How has Pascal been doing with the Task things?'

'He's been avoiding them and hiding in the crowd,' Rapunzel laughed as Pascal turned an embarrassed shade of pink, 'but I've convinced him to join us on this one, I don't want him to miss out.'

Fred and Flynn's parents had been greeting their children a little more privately than the rest but soon came over to join in with the conversations. Merida noted Fred looked like the spitting image of his father, if a little younger, right down to the same funny smirk, although his skin was a shade darker thanks to his mother's genes and he lacked the strange scarring across one ear that his father possessed.

Similarly, Rapunzel subtly noted Flynn's parents, who were both short, cheerful looking Ministry workers, unfairly dwarfed by the large frames of Stoic and Fergus as they stood next to them.

They spent the rest of the hour talking with their parents and were joined quickly by Mia and Fred's sister Roxanne, third year who, if Fred resembled their father, was a mirror image of their mother with the same black skin, braided hair and gorgeous features.

'Mum, you know Jack didn't bother to try and rescue me in the Second Task, he just left me there for the Harpies to take,' Mia had whispered evilly to their mother.

'What can I say, you looked so at home with them that I thought we'd finally found your real family,' Jack retorted jokingly, making everyone laugh.

Eventually, Professor North entered the room and, after sharing an approving glance between him, Stoic and Fergus as only large men with beards so bushy you could hide a badge in them can, silence fell as he began to talk.

'It is time for champions to make their way down to the task,' he informed them loudly, 'the families may all take their seats at stadium'

The teams gave their goodbyes to their families and left the Hall, followed by applause from fans who had stuck around to see them leave. As they left the castle a black shape hurtled out at them and ran towards Hiccup, almost colliding with him but managing to skid to a halt just in time.

'Hi bud,' Hiccup said happily as he stroked the dragon's head, 'ready

for the last task.'

The Night Fury stuck his tongue out at this in a happy manner, which Hiccup was certain was a yes. The other's had worried Toothless wouldn't be comfortable in the tunnels underground but Hiccup assured them that the Forbidden Forest contained similarly enclosed spaces as well and Toothless had adapted comfortably to them over time.

Soon they had arrived at the pitch which had changed from when they had seen it after the Second Task. The hole that led into the labyrinth was no longer dark but glowing with a yellow light that was emitted from the walls of the tunnel itself. Krum and the other Durmstrangs gave them professional nods of acknowledgment as they spread around the entrance, which the team returned while the Beauxbatons didn't give either team a look at all as they prepared themselves in a small huddle. Around them the stadiums filled up over the next five minutes and soon the entire pitch was full of cheering students.

Professors Bunnymund, Mansnoozie, Toothiana, Gobber and Whittler all strode towards them. They were all wearing a red star on their backs, except Toothiana whose wings got in the way and instead wore it on a hat worn specially for the occasion.

'We're going to be patrolling the maze,' Bunnymund explained to the teams. 'If any of you ankle-biters get into trouble, and need to be rescued, shoot red sparks back down the way you came. It'll send a message to one of us and we'll come get you, understand?'

The teams all nodded as Finnegan hurried over to them.

'Are all the team's here,' he asked, looking around to see that, indeed, they were, 'Great. So, just a little helpful advice for all of you before we begin; the exit to the labyrinth is in the East but there are other, subtler suggestions if you can't find it. All alright? Good, then let's get going.'

Finnegan now pointed his wand to his throat and said '_Sonus_', and his magically enhanced voice boomed over the stands.

'Ladies and gentlemen, the third and final task of the Tri-Team Tournament is about to begin! Let me remind you how the teams currently stand and the order they'll start in. First we have Beauxbatons who will be given no time penalty. Second is Hogwarts who will have a twenty second penalty after the Beauxbatons and finally Durmstrang in third place who will have to wait an additional fifty seconds. Beauxbatons, on my whistle. Three "two" one.'

The Beauxbatons team sped off down the entrance of the tunnel and disappeared from sight. The Hogwarts team waited, impatiently moving from one foot to the other for their twenty second penalty to be up. At last Finnegan blew his whistle a second time and they sprinted after the Beauxbatons champions into the glowing maze.

As soon as they began to follow the tunnel entrance downwards and its walls closed over them the noise from the stadium was cut off, leaving the team in an eerie quiet. They descended the last few feet until the tunnel levelled out and they found their first fork in the path.

'We'd better make a decision quickly,' Jack said as he paced impatiently from one foot to another, 'does anyone know how to find out where East is underground?'

'There's supposed to be a spell for it,' Hiccup said, 'I never learnt how to do it though. Argh, why did they have to leave that important bit of information out?'

'It's a part of the test I guess,' Fred suggested bitterly, 'only letting us in on something at the last minute to see how prepared we came. I say we take this one at random and start looking for any clues that tell us where to go.'

'If you would all stop talking,' Rapunzel interrupted suddenly, 'I could tell you that we do know a spell that tells us where East is. Or I do anyway. Explico Caeli!'

Rapunzel waved her wand above her head and, along the surface of the tunnel above them, a night sky began to unfold. It was perfectly detailed from every pinprick of light; every star was in their correct place and perfectly matched where they would be above the ground.

'That constellation is directly East,' Rapunzel explained, pointing to a cluster of stars nearest the right hand tunnel, 'so that tunnel is closest to East.'

'Well done maestro,' Jack said as he doffed an imaginary cap to her before they all hurried off down the right hand passage.

'Good thing you pay attention in Astronomy,' Flynn said as she summoned the image again when another fork appeared, 'Fred and I always fell asleep.'

'Actually, I'd already mapped out the stars by the time I was ten,' Rapunzel told him, laughing at the stunned look on his face.

A second later they ran into their first obstacle, or rather Fred did. It was a giant spider, its large bulk completely blocking off the tunnels, and when Fred saw it nearly a foot from his face he turned ash white and jumped backwards with a cry of terror while Merida stepped in to deal with it, wand raised.

Before she could utter a spell to destroy it, however, the spider immediately turned into a large bear, its large body matted and scarred with the wounds from a thousand battles.

'Oh, yer're a boggart,' Merida said, with a slight strain in her voice as she looked again into the eyes of Mordu, 'Ridikulus!'

As her spell hit the bear it immediately sprang onto its hind legs and grew a tutu around its middle before rising up on a unicycle on which it had to balance precariously. At the sight of its new form the team, including Merida, burst into laughter which forced the boggart to flee back down the labyrinth.

'So, yer afraid of spiders?' Merida asked Fred teasingly as she helped him up.

'Don't laugh okay, it's a genuine phobia,' Fred returned, a tad

touchily until Merida made her hand crawl up his arm as a mock spider, at which point he turned back into his usual laughing self.

They headed further down the labyrinth; occasionally using Rapunzel's stars to learn where to go. The tunnel they were currently heading down made an unusual sharp turn to the left, meaning they'd have to take the next right as soon as possible to get back on track. As least that was the plan, but when they had all passed the corner the lights at the side of the cave suddenly went out, leaving them in total darkness.

'Whoa, hang on a minute,' Jack's voice said, 'has the charm stopped or something?'

'Hang on,' Rapunzel's voice said somewhere in front of them, '_Lumos!_'

Nothing happened; no bright light suddenly illuminated the darkness. 'Oh,' Rapunzel said in surprise, 'this is embarrassing. That usually works'

'_Incendio_', Hiccup tried but although they all heard the whoosh of fire as it appeared above Hiccup's wand, there was still no light. 'Ah! Something brushed by me!' he yelled in alarm a second later, causing Toothless to growl at the invisible attacker.

'Sorry Hiccupâ€|that was me,' Jack's apologetic voice echoed out, stopping Toothless who recognised his voice.

'Could you keep your hands to yourself from now on,' Hiccup replied a tad coldly. Their short moment together after the Second Task had softened their attitudes to one another but they were still nowhere close to the old friendship they once had.

'I said sorry, didn't I?' Jack returned in an annoyed voice.

'Alright, you two stop arguing and everyone back up. I don't know what's wrong with this tunnel and I don't want to know,' Merida ordered from the middle of them.

'Uh, I don't think we can,' Flynn's voice came from the back, 'it feels like there's a wall in the way.'

'You mean we're blocked off?' Fred's voice asked in mixed alarm and annoyance, 'What are we supposed to do now, just walk ahead and hope not to bump into anything too dangerous?'

'What other choice do we have though?' Rapunzel asked from the front until a chirping cut her off, followed by Rapunzel's excited agreement. 'Good idea Pascal, maybe the charm won't work on it.'

'What's she on about,' Fred's voice asked but was shushed by everybody, including Flynn, when Rapunzel began to sing quickly.

'_Flower gleam and glow/ Let your power shine/ Make the clock reverseâ€|_' As she sang Rapunzel's hair began to shine with the same

golden glow it always did when its power was invoked and this time they could all see it. It filled the entire tunnel with the golden light while Rapunzel kept her eyes closed to better concentrate on maintaining the light without singing over and over again. The light revealed the tunnel was covered in devil's snare, the plant whose only weakness was heat and light, which must have appeared from opening in the wall when the lights were turned off. The vines shank back along the walls in fear from the beautiful glow of Rapunzel's healing light, though, and soon the tunnel was clear for them to walk through again.

'Her hair actually glows,' Fred said in a small voice as he watched the glow flow all the way down Rapunzel's braid, 'I really didn't see that coming'

'It can heal things too,' Flynn said pleasantly, gloating over the fact he knew about this before Fred.

'Yeah, really funny Flynn,' Fred returned sarcastically, thinking he was joking.

'No, Fred, it really does heal things,' Rapunzel assured him.

'What? Really? Blimey,' Fred said in quick succession.

'Now that we've got that out the way, can we get movin' again?' Merida asked impatiently, painfully aware that, at any moment, another team could get to the end first.

'Yes, we were supposed to scare the devil's snare off with heat I'm guessing,' Rapunzel answered as she looked quizzically at where the vines must have come from, 'I guess when they caught us we were supposed to either use fire we couldn't see or get rescued.'

Thankfully for all of them, the moment they found another fork in the path and turned into it the charm that stopped the lights faded and Rapunzel could end her hair's spell. They travelled through another couple of paths without event until they turned into another tunnel and a boot came out from the wall and kicked Hiccup in the back.

'OW! What the..?'

'What's wrong Hiccup?' Merida asked with concern as they turned to look at him and Toothless, currently at the back of the team.

'Something just hit me, I think it's a boot,' Hiccup told them as he knelt down looked at the strange contraption protruding from the wall, 'was this supposed to be threatening?'

'Let's just keep going,' Jack suggested a little more testily than he really meant to before walking a few steps forward and having a mechanical arm come out at head height and hit him full in the face with a custard pie. He spluttered for a few moments while the rest of the team laughed good-naturedly until he turned with a pop into a canary, his staff clattering to the floor as his fingers became feathers.

'Uh, Merida, do you know how to transfigure him back,' Flynn asked between stifled laughs.

Merida didn't answer as she was currently on the floor, clutching her stomach and snorting with great fits of laughter. Luckily, after another few moments, Jack turned back into a human.

'Who came up with this obstacle, the Slapstick League of England?' he asked angrily as he picked his staff back up.

The team walked through the rest of the tunnel with caution, jumping at any sudden movement which always turned out to be their own. Eventually they came to the end of the path and turned into the next tunnel when suddenly a nozzle shot down from the ceiling and sprayed out a nasty looking purple liquid at the team at high speed.

Luckily Hiccup and Toothless reacted almost immediately, leaping forward and shooting combined jets of flame at the gas, burning it away until the novel itself had melted and stopped whatever it had been doing. As the jet of gas ceased a sign popped down next to the novel saying 'LAUGH THAT ONE OFF'

Before they could say anything another sign popped down next to that one which read 'FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON ALL JOKE PRODUCTS SURPLIED IN THIS TASK PLEASE VISIT WEASLEY'S WIZARD WEEZES â€" Sincerely, George Weasley'

'When I get out of here, I'm going to kill my dad,' Fred announced as he read the signs, 'that was his new Pass Out Perfume. That much would have kept us knocked out until the end of the Task.'

'Thank God riding Toothless has given Hiccup quick reflexes,' Rapunzel said to Pascal who nodded in reply.

Thankfully the next tunnels held no improvised joke traps, or any for that matter. In the next passage the lights from the walls seemed to be dimmed, making the team wary of any sudden darkness being sprung on them again. However, they soon realised the true cause for the dimming lights.

'Is that sunlight?' Merida asked, unsure whether to believe it or not.

'It is,' Fred cheered happily, 'I don't believe it, we've made it!'

They rushed forward excitedly, already feeling the wait of the five hundred galleons they'd each receive as prize money. As soon as they were half way down, however, there was a loud groaning sound and the walls began to move around them until a section split off and swung out, covering the way out and revealing another path that went back into the labyrinth simultaneously.

'Oh come on!' Hiccup yelled in exasperation as they all skidded to a halt in front of the wall that now covered their path to victory.

'We must have to circle back round,' Rapunzel said disappointedly as she looked down the new path they would have to take, 'by the looks of it, it's a big circle.'

'Ta hell with that!' Merida said angrily as she pushed the others back and pointed her wand at the wall, '_Reducto!_'

Her spell hit the wall with a crack, leaving a smouldering fracture in its surface.

'Nice try Merida, but I don't think it would be that easy,' Fred said, admiring the damage nonetheless.

'Would ye look at what I did on my own?' Merida said accusingly as she waved her hand at the stonework, 'If ye all lend me a hand next time we might be able ta break through it.'

The others couldn't disagree with her on that point so this time they spread themselves out and pointed their wands at the weakening Merida had already made and simultaneously fired their spells.

'_Engorgio_', Rapunzel cried, using a spell to enlarge the crack already made and weaken it further for the rest to break through.

Hiccup and Toothless shot out twin blasts of fire so hot it blew a larger hole into the stone and heated the rest of it in a single moment to its melting point.

Jack spun his staff once and fired several blocks of ice which, on impact, exploded and deluged the stone in freezing water that lowered the wall's temperature so fast that it became a brittle shell, easily shattered by the combined '_Reducto_' spells fired by Merida, Fred and Flynn.

What was left of the wall was a smoking pile of masonry at the foot of a now wide open pathway that led to the exit of the labyrinth. Triumphantly, the team ran towards the light and burst out of the labyrinth, the midday air fresh in their lungs while the sun shone brightly down on them. They stepped out into the open and saw their prize, the Tri-Team Cup, sitting on a plinth and felt a rush of joy. They'd won the Tournament.

'Hello Jack,' a smooth, sophisticated voice said to their right, a voice the four recognised.

They spun around in surprise and saw the bodies of the Durmstrang team lying heaped in front of them, Krum lying at the top with his eyes closed, with several Nightmares guarding their bodies. Beyond this vision of horror stood Pitch Black, Mordu and Gothel.

'_You!_' Jack yelled angrily, readying his staff for battle while the others, except Fred and Flynn who were not yet fully aware of the danger, pointed their wands at the three.

'Uh, uh, uh,' Gothel chastised sweetly, raising her wand as she did at the bodies of the Durmstrang team, 'don't go pointing your wands so rudely, your unconscious friends might get hurt. I'm surprised at you Rapunzel; surely I raised you better than that.'

'Who are these guys?' Flynn asked Rapunzel in a low tone as he and Fred slowly readied their own wands as they sensed the tense

atmosphere coming from the four.

'They're dark wizards,' Rapunzel answered back quietly through gritted teeth. 'The one in the middle's Pitch Black. Do you remember? He escaped Azkaban and attacked Hogwarts four years ago with those Nightmare things.'

'I knew I recognised those horses from somewhere,' Flynn murmured.

'What's that you're mumbling Rapunzel? You know how I hate the mumbling; clearly whoever stole you from me has been letting your bad habits get out of control.'

'I _said_ you had better not talk that way about my parents!'
Rapunzel returned loudly as Pascal squeaked angry insults at her that only Rapunzel could understand.

'Why are ye even here?' Merida asked angrily, keeping her wand firmly pointed between Mordu's eyes, the funny image of his boggart self now a distant memory.

'Ah, I'm glad someone has begun to ask the right questions,' Pitch said happily. 'We're here for you of course; at least the four of you. The boys with the red hair and the goatee are merely collateral damage.'

'Oh, thanks a bunch,' Fred returned sarcastically.

'Not sore enough from the last time we beat you Black?' Jack added angrily to which Pitch smirked mirthlessly.

'Funnily enough Jack,' he said, 'that's exactly why we're here. You demonstrated a level of power that day which is impossible, I don't know how you did it but you did, and we consider that power to be a threat to our Dark Council. Luckily we all hold a grudge against at least one of you and so we were happy to set aside a little time to eliminate you under the cover of the Tournament.'

'Oh please,' Hiccup said in a mocking tone as Toothless growled beside him, 'you honestly expect us to believe that you arranged the Tournament to kill us.'

'Oh no, not at all young dragon rider,' Pitch answered as Mordu growled back at Toothless, locking eyes with the dragon, 'but it was I that ensured you would be chosen to compete.'

'That's not possible,' Fred interrupted, 'you couldn't have got anywhere near the Goblet of Fire.'

'I didn't have to. I've had an inside source in Hogwarts ever since the Goblet arrived. When the time came for them to put their names in, as I knew they would, all my source had to do was drop a small Nightmare into the cup without anyone realising. The Nightmare was destroyed by the Goblet's fires in the process, but not before it made sure their names would be chosen, a deception completely impossible to trace as the evidence was burnt away.'

'Admittedly, I had to retrieve some information on the intricacies of the final task from a witch who worked in the Ministry of Magic; she

gave me the names of the people who knew what I needed. All I had to do was use a faithful servant to infect them with small versions of my Nightmares who took over their minds and gave me all the information I wanted. After that my source has kept an eye on you, watching you whenever you trained together so we would know the full extent of your magical skills and knowledge, which has led you all, inexorably, here.'

'**You let that lot get here first**,' Mordu added, indicating the Durmstrang team, '**but we took care of them before they could take the winner's cup**.'

The team stood dumbstruck, barely breathing as the implications of Black's words hit them. He'd orchestrated everything to make sure they would arrive at this moment, like a spider fixing its web to draw in the flies. And what was worse was that there was someone in Hogwarts who was on the Council's side, Black's source, whoever they were.

Without saying anything else, Fred pointed his wand to the sky and shot red sparks from it which rose well above them in the air. 'They'll be coming to see what's wrong any second now,' he told the three, 'I'd say you better run along before you're outnumbered even more.'

The Council laughed nastily at this, sneering at Fred as if he'd just said something completely stupid. 'I'm afraid not,' Gothel mocked, 'we set up a charm to make sure no warning signal would alert anyone to our presence, nice try though.'

'Oh really,' Flynn said, 'Do you think it'll work on this?' He then threw the contents of his pockets; Weasley's Indoor Fireworks, into the air and hit them with a spell from his wand. The fireworks exploded above them and, by the looks on the Council's face, were visible to the wizards at the stadium. Snarling angrily, Pitch snapped his wand out and both Fred and Flynn were hit with a large wave of black sand which sent them flying to the ground unconscious.

'**Why is it your ideas never work?**' Mordu snarled at Gothel angrily as he shifted his stance into a more battle ready one as the four raised their wands to fire their own spells while Toothless prepared a fireball.

'Shut up,' Gothel said, nervously scanning the grounds for incoming wizards, 'we have to do it now Pitch or they'll know what we're up to.'

They were too late, however, as at that moment the patrolling teachers appeared at the entrance to the tunnels. They took one confused look at the Hogwarts team, their wands still raised, and the heap of Durmstrang students next to them, unsure of what to think.

'What the hell happened here?' Bunnymund asked accusingly before the teachers finally saw the Dark Council standing in front of them.

'Pitch!' Toothiana yelled furiously while Whittler and Maximus yelled simultaneously.

'Mordu?'

'Gothel!'

In the second it took the teachers and the four to readjust to the situation Pitch waved his wand about his head in a command. The Nightmares that had been guarding the Durmstrang bodies charged forward immediately in obedience and caught up the four in their own individual swirl of black sand. Before they could do anything to fight back they each felt themselves being pulled away from the finishing area by the Nightmares and felt the landscape shift beneath them as the Nightmares apparated them out of Hogwarts.

To Fred and Flynn, who were looking blearily up from the ground where they had been left unconscious, it seemed as if they had been consumed by four vortexes of black sand which vanished, taking them with it. The next second the Council had disappeared after them with a pop and the distant echo of laughter.

'Where did they go?' Fred asked the teachers as they all stood dumbstruck.

'We don't know,' came the unsure reply.

* * *

><p>Dun, dun, DUN!

**Yes, this is how I'm ending the chapter :D **

Don't worry though, I'm going to try and release the next one as quickly as possible.

Until then, I hope you enjoyed the chapter and have a good weekend :)

* * *

><p>P.S I would also just like to say that Nelson Mandela's death is a terrible loss for the world. He was truly an inspiring and incredible person who worked tirelessly to achieve the future he so hoped for. RIP Nelson Mandela

20. The Trap

The Trap

Hiccup, Jack and Toothless hit the ground hard as the Nightmares released them, it wasn't helped by the fact that the ground was in fact made from large round rocks. They scrambled to their feet immediately and looked around for Pitch and the others but a thick mist blocked everything further away than five feet from their view.

'Where are we?' Jack asked as he tried to look through the impenetrable fog.

'I think I know,' Hiccup answered as he shared a look with Toothless

who was sniffing the air nervously.

'I'm impressed little rider. It must be nearly five years since you stepped foot, excuse the pun, on this island,' Pitch's voice said from the fog, his shadow appearing from the mist. Without hesitating Jack fired an ice bolt at it while Hiccup and Toothless added fireballs for good measure which all hit the shadow and went straight through it. In its place several more of Pitch's shadows appeared on the surface of the mist and circled the three casually.

'Where are our friends Black!' Jack snarled as he, Hiccup and Toothless went back to back, keeping as many Pitch shadows in their fields of vision as possible.

'Oh, they're with the rest of the Council. We're having some individual sessions with you all right now so that you won't get together and cause any anomalies.'

'Well you've made a mistake,' Hiccup boasted while Toothless made a snickering growl beside him, 'There're three of us with only one of you.'

'Don't sound so confident Berkian. I told you that each member of the Dark Council has a grievance against at least one of you and you're no different. The only reason my pet didn't join us at Hogwarts is because he is rather conspicuous, but now you'll have a chance to meet him.'

'You never told me you had an arch enemy too,' Jack said to Hiccup as the fog swirled around them.

'I didn't know I did,' Hiccup replied confusedly, 'Then again I might have made one without realising. I am a Viking after all, we have stubbornness issues.'

At these words the fog began to clear around them and soon the island they were on became visible. Hiccup's suspicion had been right, it was the dragon's nest where the Red Terror lived and had been killed by Hiccup. The black spire appeared in the centre of the island, large and spikier than Hiccup remembered and, between them and it, stood Pitch Black with his wand raised.

When the fog cleared entirely Hiccup gasped as he saw what it had truly been hiding. Along the sides of the black spire hundreds of dragons lay coiled along the rock, giving it the large spiky look Hiccup had seen. He could see Monstrous Nightmares clustered close to the top while other dragons covered the rest of the spire's surface; he even noticed a Hungarian Horntail clinging to the spire's side. But the largest and deadliest dragon rested at the bottom, a Red Terror.

'Meet my pet Terror. You and your dragon killed one of his own five years ago, leaving him the last of his kind, and he wants revenge,' Pitch said as Terror raised his gigantic head and fixed all six beady eyes on Hiccup, his dragon minions doing the same. 'Kill them,' Pitch ordered calmly.

Hiccup barely had enough time to jump onto Toothless and connect his foot to the stirrup before Terror roared an order and the dragons along the spire jumped into the air and dived at Hiccup and

Toothless. They leaped into the air together and followed by half a dozen dragons while Terror watched from below.

Jack summoned the winds to join and help them but a whip of black sand caught him and spun him back to the ground before disappearing back onto Pitch's wand.

'Leaving so soon,' Pitch mocked as Jack gritted his teeth, 'Sorry Jack but if you want to save him you had better let us finish what we started.'

Yelling in frustration Jack charged forward and met Pitch's black sand spell with an icy one of his own, causing an explosion of cold and dark between them.

* * *

><p>Merida landed on mud, the lumpy stuff clinging to her robes as she staggered up and looked around for the others. She was standing on a raised patch of earth that stood above a circle of trees which swept away to form a forest. Around her several cairns stood, decorated with strange and unreadable carvings, and Merida realised where she was. The stone circle where she and the others had fought Mordu before their third year.<p>

A snapping sound caught her attention and she turned to see Mordu prowling from out of the forest, followed by a group of wizards dressed in black robes and wearing matching white blank masks with only eye slits for features who emerged from the trees all around the cairns, creating their own circle which enclosed around the hill where Merida and Mordu stood.

'Mordu, where are the others?' She demanded, pointing her wand at the bear angrily although it shook with a touch of fear at the memory of when they last met.

'**You should be more concerned for yourself my niece**,' Mordu answered as he stopped at the opposite end of the stone circle to her. They began to circle one another slowly, maintaining the same distance between one another.

'Why have ye taken me back here?' She continued, keeping a wary eye on the circle of men and women who surrounded them.

'**To take what is mine**,' Mordu snarled menacingly, '**This will serve as the place where I take the power of the True King from your bloodline by right of victory in battle. Don't worry about them**,' he added, motioning with his head at the circle around them, '**They're faithful servants of the Dark Council, Pitch calls them the Dream Eaters, here to mark my ascension, nothing more.**'

'Ye want my power Mordu?' Merida asked mockingly as they continued circling, her eyes now fully focused on the bear.

'**The power is mine by right! I just have to prove it**.'

'Then come and get it!' Merida challenged before firing a stunning spell at the bear's eyes, making him roar and charge, his claws ready to rend and tear.

* * *

><p>Rapunzel fell into soft grass as the Nightmares released her and she pulled herself up quickly while Pascal hid in her robe pocket to stay out the way. She gasped as she saw where she was. In front of her an old stone tower stood, it had no discernible doors or windows at ground level, only one window right at the top beneath the slanting roof. She was back at her hoâ€|Gothel's tower.<p>

'It's been a while since we were last here wasn't it dear?' Gothel said as she looked up the tower admiringly, 'I thought it was only fitting to return here, from beginning to end.'

'What are you talking about, and where are my friends?' Rapunzel demanded as she pointed her wand at Gothel who looked at it with a mixture of irritation and anger.

'I'm talking about taking you back home Rapunzel,' Gothel replied in the stern voice she'd used on Rapunzel all those years ago.

'Don't bother with all of that,' Rapunzel spat angrily, 'I know you kidnapped me. I know you were keeping me for my power!'

'Very true, but not anymore.'

'What, what do you mean?' Rapunzel asked in a surprised tone.

'When you were stolen from me, my source of youth was taken with you. For five years I've had to suffer feeling myself age, but with all that time I came up with a way to make sure it never happened again. I've created a spell that will transfer your healing magic to me, ensuring that I will be able to remain youthful for eternity. It will kill you in the process of course, but by then you won't be necessary.'

Rapunzel gulped as she heard these words come from the woman she'd loved as a mother for ten years but kept her wand steady. 'Too bad you're never getting the chance. _Wingardium Leviosa_!'

'_Descendo_!' At Gothel's words their spells met in mid-air and cancelled one another out with a small bang.

'_Arbour Flagellum_!'

'_Radicis_!' The roots Rapunzel had summoned from the ground to strike Gothel were hit with her the witch's spell and immediately withered and crumbled to nothing. Gothel was smiling, having not yet attacked but merely countering with the lazy air of the very bored.

Gritting her teeth Rapunzel cried, '_Lumos solem_!' to shoot a blinding ray of light at Gothel's smiling face.

'_Nox_,' with a flick Rapunzel's light vanished as it was countered by Gothel.

'Why can't I hit you?' Rapunzel asked through gritted teeth as she watched the dark witch.

'Didn't you hear Pitch tell you? We've kept an eye on your training sessions and we know all of your favourite fighting techniques and taught ourselves how best to beat them. I doubt your friends are doing much better; the Dark Council knows exactly how each of you fights and how to easily stop you. Now then, _incarcerous_!'

Large, heavy chains wrapped themselves around Rapunzel before she had a chance to react and bound her entire body except for her hair which it left untouched. She fell to the floor, writhing against the chains as Gothel stalked over to her.

Kneeling down the witch grabbed her by the hair and said, 'It's time we got a move on, but first, a little top up.'

* * *

><p>'That's it!' Professor North stormed after Fred and Flynn had explained what happened while the Durmstrang students were being revived by Madam Pomfrey, 'I have had it with Tournament! Next year we do knitting! And when I get hold of Pitch I'll tear him apart with all both my hands!'

'How _are_ we going to find him?' Bunnymund asked in his usual Australian drawl, 'Sandy can't keep their parents in the dark forever.'

'No worries Bunny,' North replied as he saw Toothiana flying back towards them at top speed, 'Pitch may think he's smart but he doesn't know all my tricks.'

'I got them as fast as I could North,' Toothiana told him as she dropped a scimitar and several large spheres into North's arms, 'The parents are hurrying here as fast as they can but they have to go on foot as long as they're in the grounds.'

'Good work Tooth, now leave to me,' North said before turning to Fred and Flynn again, 'Where _exactly_ were the four when they were taken?'

'Over there sir,' Fred said, pointing out for spots where the grass had been shifted into an unusual pattern, 'Sir, if you're going to help them then I want to come too.'

'Same with me,' Flynn stated as he stood by Fred.

'Absolutely not! It is too dangerous with so many dark wizards.'

'All the more reason why you should have us along, safety in numbers after all,' Fred persuaded eagerly.

'And we've been doing pretty much nothing but learn how to fight this year,' Flynn added.

'I still say no!' North said with finality as he began to prepare the Snow Globes to track the apparition of the Nightmares.

'Headmaster North, on this one occasion I must disagree with you,' Professor Maximus said as he strode towards them with Harry Potter following quickly, 'These two have learned to fight with the four

over this entire year, so they are best suited to fighting besides them and will be most effective at helping to save them.'

'They are underage,' North reminded him, 'their parents would never allow it.'

'They do actually,' Harry corrected, 'Both of their parents were underage at some point during the Second Wizarding War and they haven't forgotten it. George said to me that if Fred can help then he gives whatever permission you need and Flynn's parent's agree, but all the champion's parents are asking to join the fight as well.'

North stood for a moment, thinking it over, before eventually coming to a decision. 'Very well, they can come. Madam Pomfrey, can you tell the parents when they get here that they must join us at once, the Snow Globe portals will remain open for them, but we cannot wait for them to run here.'

With that North threw four Snow Globes at the points where the four had been taken which then exploded to reveal four portals, two of which shimmered and then fused together.

'Right, we must go in groups,' North said as he turned back, 'three portals means three groups, I suggestâ€|uh, yes Maximus?'

'North, I know which portal leads to Rapunzel,' Maximus said, 'Ryder and I will go after her if you don't mind.'

Flynn and North looked at the ex-Auror, taken aback, but soon recovered themselves and, with a nod, North let them charge through the portal to the left.

'I can tell which one's got Merida and Mordu,' Whittler said as she watched the image in the centre portal.

'Very good, I say you go with Bunnymund andâ€|'

'I'll go,' Fred said hurriedly as he joined the two teachers. North looked irritated that no one seemed to be paying much attention to his plan but nodded and let the group go.

'That means it's you two and me,' he finished, looking between Harry and Tooth who nodded and followed him through the third portal.

* * *

><p>Hiccup and Toothless were using every trick they had to dodge the growing horde of dragons that surrounded them. Many of the dragons had shot fire at the contraptions of the saddle and Toothless's artificial tail fin to burn them out of the sky. Luckily Hiccup had asked Rapunzel to help him charm the entire saddle and all its additions to be immune to fire or damage, clearly Pitch didn't know everything about him.<p>

Even so they were having a tough time preventing Hiccup from getting hit, every time they rolled or dived another dragon appeared in front of them with flames and claws at the ready. As they rolled out of the way of a Zippleback the Hungarian Horntail swept its tail at them and hit Toothless on the side, sending them falling through the masses in

a spin until they managed to regain their balance in the air and lift back up, only to be caught in another swarm of dragons.

'_Arma igni_!' He cried as he stood up in Toothless's stirrups and the end of his wand burst into flames which grew until they became a burning sword with his wand as the hilt. Hiccup swung the blade at the dragons which closed in around them, doing little damage to their fireproof scales but knocking them off balance and sending them flying away which gave him and Toothless more breathing room for the moment. He knew it couldn't last long though, he could feel Toothless and himself getting more tired as every minute passed while Terror hadn't spent any energy himself yet, save for that of his dragon minions.

Beneath them Jack was doing no better. Pitch knew every move he was going to use before he used it and laughed mockingly as he deflected each attack and retaliated with his own. It didn't help that Jack was distracted by the flashes of fire from above which reminded him of Hiccup's danger while Pitch sent wave after wave of black sand attacks at him.

'Getting tired Jack?' Pitch gloated as he made Jack stumble backwards with a barrage of attacks.

'Not yet!' Jack replied as he swung his staff and sent icicles at Pitch who easily blocked them with a wall of sand which was sent rushing out to meet him.

'Please Jack, it's like you're not even trying,' Pitch said with disappointment as Jack dodged around the wall.

'For that one I wasn't,' Jack said with a smile, his last attack had given Pitch too much confidence and the dark wizard had left himself wide open, '_Stupefy_!'

Pitch was blown back by the spell, a look of surprised incomprehension on his face, and landed heavily on the hard stone beach.

'What?' Jack asked smugly as Pitch rose, still looking bewildered, 'Do you think they don't teach me anything at school?'

Exactly then, something exploded behind him and a voice said, 'Good work Jack, why don't we lend you a hand?'

Behind him three figures appeared from the glowing circle of light that hung behind him and Toothiana, North and Harry Potter emerged, their wands pointed at Pitch who snarled at their arrival.

* * *

><p>Merida and Mordu were both panting as they circled one another again. Merida had to admit, in some ways this was exhilarating, Mordu was easily the most deadly and dangerous enemy she had ever faced, as well as the most powerful. So far she'd got nothing but a light scratch on one arm from a graze with his claw while Mordu had a slight limp in his front right paw from one of Merida's reducto spells. Even with such minor injuries they both knew that when they restarted the battle one of them would die and Merida was afraid it would be her. Mordu alone was powerful, with his incredible immunity

to magic coupled with his enormous strength, but now he seemed to know most of Merida's fighting moves and was using each one to his advantage.<p>

No matter what though, Merida would not give in and soon she found herself and Mordu ready to charge one another again. Without hesitating they ran forward to renew the fight but before they could reach one another a circle of glowing light appeared between them, forcing both to stop.

'**What is this?**' Mordu asked indignantly as he sniffed at the circle warily. As he did something shot out from it and disappeared above his head but before he or Merida could track its movement a knife shot out from the circle and cut Mordu along the nose who howled and reared back to a safer position as three figures jumped from the portal.

'G'day mate,' Bunnymund said as he stepped out, 'you're not going to like this next bit.'

As he said it Mordu was knocked down by a boomerang which hit him squarely on the back of the head before bouncing back to Bunnymund. Soon, however, the Demon Bear was up again and roaring to the circle of the Dark Council's followers to attack. The air was suddenly full of flying spells, forcing Bunnymund and Whittler to defend themselves against the onslaught while Merida rushed to join them, but not fast enough.

Fred was blocking the spells of the followers and retaliating along with the teachers when Mordu appeared behind him, standing at his full height over the boy. Unfortunately, this meant his shadow fell in front of Fred who noticed it and began to turn around in curiosity just before Merida shouted, 'Fred, behind ye! Move!' The words made him twist and leap instinctively back, just in time to prevent Mordu landing a killing blow, but not dodging the hit entirely.

'No!' Merida screamed as Mordu crouched over the bloody body of Fred, pointing her wand to fire a spell. Before she had the chance, however, Whittler sent a swarm of knives to slash and cut at the bear who roared in defiance and charged the old woman, leaving Fred's body while Bunnymund distracted the entire group of followers alone.

'I should've found and turned ye into a rug years ago!' Whittler screeched as her knives flashed around the bear while she cast additional spells at him.

'**Old hag!**' Mordu snarled as he swept the last of her knives away and knocked her down with a swift blow. He turned to find Merida was at the boy's side, lifting his head to see the terrible damage Mordu had done. Mordu looked to his side to see his followers forcing the rabbit back with their numbers before prowling towards Merida to finish what he'd started.

* * *

><p>Maximus and Flynn landed together on the peaceful grass enclosure that served as the hiding place for Gothel's tower together.<p>

'I should have known she'd take Rapunzel here,' Maximus said to himself, 'she does love symbolism.'

'How do you know so much about her,' Flynn asked curiously as they looked around for any sign of an attack.

'Now's not the time,' Maximus said which was answered by a loud cackle. Gothel appeared in front of them with her wand already drawn. She was laughing as if they had said something incredibly funny while other figures, cloaked and wearing masks, began to appear around the enclosure.

'Still feel ashamed about it Maximus?' She asked mockingly which made Maximus grit his teeth in annoyance.

'Where's Rapunzel?' Flynn asked angrily, ignoring the witch's words.

'I'm standing in front of a tower, hidden in an enclosed glade and you ask where my captive is. You're not the brightest one are you?' Gothel replied sarcastically.

'Enough of this,' Maximus snarled angrily before flicking his wand and sending a stunning spell at Gothel who ducked to dodge it. That was the cue for the masked wizards who charged in to attack Flynn and Maximus with a wave of spells while Gothel added her own, sending silver blades to stab and cut them.

Maximus was incredible, using shielding charms to block several spells at once while dodging the rest and retaliating so fast two dark wizards were already knocked out. Flynn assisted him as best as he could, deflecting spells and sending some wizards to sleep or knocking them out with stunning spells. All the while they blocked and retaliated against Gothel who was laughing happily as Maximus and Flynn were forced back to back.

'It's no use. You get Rapunzel out of there and I'll keep her distracted,' Maximus snarled while he lifted one wizard into the air and flung him several feet away.

'I can't leave you with this!' Flynn shouted back.

'You can and you will!' With those words Maximus pushed Flynn with a spell out of the closing circle of wizards where he landed heavily. Some had turned to attack him while Maximus kept the rest busy; he deflected the shots from two and hit another with hex that sprouted mushrooms over his face. He finished the other two by combining a hex with a transfiguration spell, leaving one wizard covered in boils and the other turning into an oyster.

He ran to the base of the tower and looked for any way to get through, but there were no doors at this level, only a window right at the top of the tower. 'Rapunzel!' He called out desperately, 'Let down your hair!'

He waited for what seemed like hours before, miracle of miracles, a long, golden line of hair was thrown out the window and hung down the entire side of the tower, allowing him to climb it. His progress was irritatingly slow in his desperation to reach her but finally he climbed onto the windowsill and heaved himself through into the tower.

'Rapunzel, I thought I'd never see you again,' he said in a relieved tone before stopping as he saw Rapunzel wrapped in chains and bound to a post.

'Look out!' She cried, but it was too late, Gothel had appeared from her hiding place behind him and sent a silver dagger into his side with her wand. He collapsed in pain as Rapunzel strained against her chains to get to him.

'Now look what you've done Rapunzel,' Gothel said as she grabbed Rapunzel's chains, 'And now I'll have to take you somewhere else to finish the ritual. Stop fighting!' She yelled as Rapunzel pulled against her and Pascal bit into her robe to pull her away. With one kick the chameleon was sent flying into the wall way he lay, unmoving.

'I'll never stop fighting you every day for the rest of my life!' Rapunzel declared as she stared up at Gothel, 'But, if you let me heal him, I'll go with you and you can take my powers.'

'Rapunzel no,' Flynn said before clutching at his wound when pained stabbed into him. Gothel looked from him to Rapunzel and nodded her head, a few seconds later she had bound Flynn with new chains and allowed Rapunzel to approach him.

'I can't let you do this,' Flynn whispered to her as he pushed her hair from him.

'And I can't let you die,' she replied truthfully as she moved her hair back to the bloody stain at his side. 'Hey,' she whispered comfortingly, 'it's going to be alright.'

'Rapunzelâ€|wait,' Flynn coughed as he reached to brush her hair from her face. IN one swift motion he reached further and gripped all of Rapunzel's hair while simultaneously using a shard of glass that had been next to him, from a mirror broken years ago by Gothel on realising Rapunzel had been taken, to cut every single strand. The large mass of hair fell from Rapunzel's head, leaving the remainder shorter than it had been in years, and darker too, for the moment it was cut her hair turned deep brown.

'NO!' Gothel screamed as she gathered the last remaining strands of blonde hair that turned brown even as she clasped them. 'What have you DONE?' She screamed as her last connection to immortality literally slipped from her fingers before apparating with scream of fury.

Rapunzel had eyes only for Flynn though. 'No, no, no, no, no. Eugene,' she said desperately as she cupped Flynn's face as he looked up to her. He gently lifted his hand to cup her face and smiled as she lifted it to her short hair and began to sing the song she knew so well.

'Rapunzel,' he said, breaking her from her desperate attempts.

'What?' She asked near tears as she watched the life slip from his eyes.

'You were my new dream,' he whispered and she, both happily and

tearfully, replied, 'And you were mine.'

With that the life left Flynn's eyes and his hand became limp against hers. Only then did Rapunzel cry, his body in her arms, and in a sad voice she recited the last few lines of the song that, in her darkest hour, had failed her.

Heal what has been hurt,

Change the fates design.

_Save what has been lost. _

Bring back what once was mine,

What once was mine.

As her song ended Rapunzel shed a final tear that fell onto Flynn's cheek. Quietly, it vanished into his skin, leaving behind a glowing sun that faded a second later. Rapunzel looked down and saw that Flynn's wound was flowing with a bright light that erupted and spread throughout the room in soft curves and glowing waves. In its centre at Flynn's side the light fixed itself into the form of a flower, whose petals illuminated the room before vanishing.

After a second, Rapunzel heard the distinct sound of Flynn breathing in and turned to see his eyes flicker open again. 'You I've always had a thing for brunettes,' he joked which made Rapunzel cheer in delight and pull him towards her, kissing him happily which he returned. After a few minutes Maximus blasted his way into the room from the floor, having discovered a hidden staircase, and found the two there.

Clearing his throat noisily to make sure they knew he was there he said, 'If you two are done I'd like to get back to Hogwarts before Gothel returns with reinforcements.'

* * *

><p>Merida crouched over Fred's unconscious body, cradling his bleeding head in her lap. Mordu's claws had managed to land a hit, leaving a deep slash along the left side of Fred's cheek while a second claw had got his left eye. There was nothing left of it now but a wound that bled down one side of his face. A shadow fell over them both and she looked up into the black eyes of Mordu, who seemed to be smiling even with his expressionless face.<p>

'**Poor little Dunbroch**,' he mocked, '**You're not going to cry again are you?**'

Without giving her time to answer the Demon Bear rose onto his hind legs and began to swing his claws to cleave her head from her shoulders. In the time it took him to stand and begin swinging Merida felt her own time slow down. She looked from the bear above her to the people around them; Bunnymund was still battling the Dream Eaters while Whittler lay unconscious from her battle with Mordu.

A blue light caught her attention and she looked up to see the small blue flames of wisps, watching from the tops of the cairns. Watching her with an almost expectant look. In that moment she realised what

she had to do, grabbing Fred and pulling him out of the way of Mordu's paw just in time as it smashed heavily into the ground. She rolled with him until they were lying in the exact centre of the stone circle where she rested him and stood to face Mordu, who was already running after them.

'Not this time Mordu,' she replied simply before raising her right hand, her wand still in its palm, and brought it down onto the ground.

With a great whoosh! blue flames erupted from her palm and spread from the centre of the circle like a ripple, hitting Mordu square in the chest and sending him flying back, out of the circle and to the edges of the forests where his followers were blown backwards with him. They all stared in wonder and fear at the cairns which were now glowing with a blue light, their intricate carvings aflame with renewed power.

Bathed in the blue light, Merida stood at the circle's centre and said down to Mordu, 'The land recognises me as the True Queen Mordu! And you and yer men are not welcome!'

With her words the blue flames erupted from the ground again and engulfed the trees around Mordu and his followers, surrounding them and forcing them all to apparate to safety. Mordu was the last who bellowed in anger as the flames forced him to leave the battle and the prize he had sought. The moment he disappeared the blue flames vanished, leaving the trees unharmed, and a second's silence rang throughout the circle as Bunnymund and Whittler watched Merida with awe.

Quickly she bent down and clasped Fred's head in her hands, his breath coming more shallowly now than before. Several wisps appeared beside her as she tried to lift him towards the portal.

'Can ye help me?' She asked hopefully. Without a word the wisps moved towards Fred's injured eye and flowed over it for a few seconds in brilliant blue light before leaving him and vanishing with a sigh. The wound no longer bled and the slash was no longer as deep, it was as if the wisps had cauterized the wounds to save Fred, but not heal him entirely. He moaned and his eye fluttered as he began to regain consciousness to her relief. Shrugging with the knowledge that Rapunzel could probably heal Fred perfectly; Merida lifted him up onto one shoulder and helped him walk through the portal.

* * *

><p>Hiccup and Toothless dived again, trying to use their superior speed to get to the Red Death before the other dragons got to them but a stray Gronkle got in their way and forced them to bank sharply to the left. As the dragons closed in around them again a bright blur flashed past, knocking into the dragon's wings and tails which sent them into falling spins as they tried to regain balance. A second later and Professor Toothiana was hovering next to him.<p>

'What's the plan Hiccup?' She asked quickly as they soared away to avoid another wave of dragons.

'We've got to get to that Red Death. If Toothless and I can knock it down for even a second it should lose control of the dragons for a

moment and we can escape while their confused,' he explained as they circled above the massive dragon who watched them lazily. 'How's Jack doing?'

'Fine now that North and Harry are helping him,' Tooth explained, 'I'll give you the opening you need, when I do, take that thing out!'

With that she swooped away again and into the dragon hordes who were knocked from the air as their wings and tail fins were forcibly closed or moved by the professor. Hiccup and Toothless hovered, waiting for the right moment andâ€|there! Tooth had knocked out and attracted enough dragons to leave an opening and they dived through it at supersonic speeds. As they gained momentum Toothless began emitting the strange screeching noise that forewarned a powerful fire blast and, at the moment they began to level out beside Terror's head, he shot it at full blast.

The explosion knocked the bellowing dragon to the side and, as Hiccup had predicted, the dragons began to fly confusedly as they regained control over themselves, giving Toothiana a chance to escape and fly down to them.

'Now for Pitch,' she said as she looked down to the battle below. Pitch was faring well enough against three opponents, aided by his Nightmares he was able to keep each of them occupied enough to prevent too many of their spells being directed at him. Even so it was taking all of his concentration to maintain the battle like this and any interference would mean his defeat.

That interference came in the form of a teen Berkian and his Nightfury. Swooping down again they shot a combined fireball at the dark wizard who was forced to leap away to save himself, giving the other to finish off the Nightmares.

'Let's go,' Tooth ordered as Pitch and Terror began to rise again, 'before they have a chance to fight back!'

Quickly they all hurried back through the portal, Hiccup and Toothless flying low to grab Jack and carry him through the shining doorway. As they began to pass through the portal Jack looked back to see Pitch pointing his wand angrily at them and mouthing the words to a spell which illuminated the tip of his wand and then, as they passed back into Hogwarts, he was gone.

* * *

><p>They all came through the Snow Globe portals together, landing on the ground as one while a crowd gathered before them. They all struggled to their feet as the portals closed behind them and, laughing and cheering in victory, the team hugged and checked one another for injuries.<p>

'What happened to yer hair?' Merida asked Rapunzel in shock as they all stared at the girls much shorter, raggedly cut fringe.

'Never mind that, what happened to Fred's eye?' Flynn asked in horror as he saw Fred's terrible scar.

'No worries Flynn, I'm fine, really,' Fred reassured him, although in

a dazed voice.

For now, it was over and they were all safe. Except they weren't, Rapunzel realised.

'Professor North,' she said to the headmaster urgently as he discussed the situation with the teachers, causing the others to look round at her, 'here's something you need to know.'

'What? Is something wrong? We should get all of you to Hospital Wing,' He replied worriedly as the other teachers looked on.

'No, it's just thatâ€¦' Black said he had an inside source at Hogwarts, someone who'd been working for him since the Goblet arrived.'

'That's right,' Merida agreed, 'he said they used a Nightmare to trick the Goblet to make sure we got in.'

'That's impossible, how could any of his servants have got in?' Toothiana asked, although now watching the crowd warily.

'If they were working for Pitch since the Goblet's arrival, it could have been one of the other schools,' Bunnymund suggested while the two coats of arms of Beauxbatons and Durmstrang appeared above Mansnoozie's head in golden sand with a question mark next to them.

'Excuse me?' Elias Mycroft's voice asked angrily. 'Am I to take it that _I_ am under suspicion for this?'

'Or myself?' Madame Maxime asked as she towered over the teachers, 'How can you accuse either Mycroft or me? 'Ave we not proven our distaste of the dark arts many times before?'

'It was just a thought my friends,' North assured them, 'I promise, you are beneath no suspicion.'

'It can't have been them anyway,' Hiccup said as he dismounted from Toothless, 'they couldn't have got close enough to the Goblet to sneak the Nightmare in. The question is who could? And who could have spied on our training sessions without us noticing for the entire year?'

'Me,' a voice said behind the team and the teachers. They turned slowly as one to see Jack standing slightly apart from them, his head looking at the ground.

'What was that?' Fred asked. In answer Jack looked up to face them, his usually ice blue eyes a deep, bottomless black.

'I did it, or at least, part of me did,' Jack answered again with a cruel smile that was not his. In a flash he had raised his staff above his head and slammed the butt of it into the ground, releasing a gale of freezing winds which blew away the crowd and the teachers while sparing the rest of the team. Columns of ice rose rapidly from the ground in a large circle around the six and Toothless, separating them from the crowd and leaving them alone with Jack. When his spell was complete Jack walked casually forward, making the others step back warily as one, and observed the ice walls he'd created which the

teachers were firing spells at in a hopeless attempt to break through.

'Jack? What's going on?' Flynn asked as he and the rest of the team pulled out their wands.

'Isn't it obvious?' Jack asked in a cruel manner, 'Little Frost's been spying for me unknowingly ever since the Tournament began.'

'Pitch!' Merida yelled furiously, 'What have ye done ta him?'

'I've infected his mind with a Nightmare,' Pitch explained through Jack's mouth, 'I sent it to him the night after your arrival at Hogwarts this year, unfortunately at such a long distance I was not able to take him over completely but only subconsciously. To ensure that the Guardians would suspect nothing the Nightmare lay dormant in his mind until the day Jack saw the Goblet of Fire. Only then would it start influencing his actions, encouraging you to compete and, when you did, dropping a second Nightmare I sent to him into the Goblet alongside your names.'

'After that the Nightmare would watch whenever you trained together to see how skilled you had become and would hibernate for the rest of the time to limit the chance of discovery. However, thanks to the Guardian's interference I had to strengthen the Nightmare inside Jack just before he vanished, allowing me to take him over completely and use him as my weapon of last resort. Now then,' Jack said, twirling his staff in a fighting movement, 'which of you wish to die at your friend's hands first.'

He swung the staff around in a wide arc and ice shards, three feet long with sharpened edges, soared towards them. Rapunzel waved her wand and roots grew and rose from the ground to form a wall where the shards buried themselves deeply. Jack spun around and used his momentum from the last swing to slash his staff downwards in a vertical cut, sending a thin blade of icy winds at the wall, cutting the roots in half and almost reaching Rapunzel if Hiccup and Toothless hadn't deflected it with blasts of flame.

'How are you going to fight me if you won't hit me,' Pitch gloated through Jack as they were forced to dodge a bombardment of razor sharp hail from above. 'Too scared to hurt your friend? Well that's a problem because he's very willing to hurtâ€|'

The rest of his sentence was cut off as Merida shot a stunning spell at him, which he was forced to block before shooting a razor sharp disc of ice at her. Merida spun around the disc easily and advanced further; shooting more spells which made the controlled Jack stumble backwards in his attempt to block them all.

'Merida what are you doing?' Fred called, twisting his head to keep her in his line of sight as she pushed Jack further.

'I've duelled Jack for nearly five years now, do ye really think I'm not willin' ta knock him out if I have ta,' she replied in a pause between her and Jack as they fought to catch their breaths.

'Finally somebody who knows how to have a little fun,' Pitch said as he twisted Jack's body around to send three simultaneous ice blasts

at Merida at once. She managed to defend herself against one but the other two were burned away by dragon fire or deflected with another spell. The rest of the team ran to her aid and began to fire their spells at Jack, trying desperately to slow him down or knock him out but with Pitch adding extra knowledge and expertise to his fighting style Jack was able to fight back.

He ducked under Flynn's golden sleeping charm and hit him with a large slab of ice which crashed him into the ice wall around the circle. Next he raised the slab to block Fred and Merida's stunning spells before trapping them in a swirling vortex of icy wind and tossing them away. He lost control of his body and was lifted into the air by Rapunzel's levitation charm, using his staff he tried to fire spells done at her but was unable to get a good shot. Hiccup and Toothless now shot down at him from above, diving at incredible speeds through the air. Desperately Jack used the winds to twist his body around and fired a stunning ice bolt into Toothless's face, confusing the dragon's and causing his path to falter and gave Jack the opportunity to grab onto his reins and pull himself onto Toothless's back. Hiccup fired a jelly legs jinx at him but he dodged and retaliated with a flick of his staff which summoned the winter winds around Toothless's wings, sending dragon and rider into a spin, crashing to the ground while Jack rose into the air again. Rapunzel flicked her wand and roots erupted from the earth, their tips pointing skyward, before being fired at Jack who spun and twisted around all but the last which he caught by the tip with the crook of his staff. Using all his strength he spun the root missile around and fired it back as a frozen icicle, which shattered in front of Rapunzel and sent her stumbling backwards. All of this took less than a minute and, as Jack descended back to the ground, the team struggled back up into fighting positions.

'This isn't going to work,' Hiccup said to Merida from atop Toothless while Fred, Flynn and Rapunzel returned to the fight.

'Got any other ideas?' Merida asked as she watched Jack dodge more spells. Hiccup didn't answer straight away but instead stared at the battle without seeing for a few seconds, wondering if there was perhaps a way, but it was risky and dangerous.

'Maybe,' he replied as he dismounted from Toothless, 'if you and Toothless can keep him distracted long enough for me to get close I might be able to stop him.'

'Ye heard him Toothless, let's go get him,' she said to the dragon who growled in acknowledgment. They raced forward just as Jack blasted away the others and sent a spell and fireball at him simultaneously. He spun his staff around to form a thin shield of mist and ice which blocked both attacks before retaliating with a gale of wind. Toothless and Merida split away to dodge but joined together again almost immediately, Merida using Toothless's back as a platform to jump above Jack, shooting a stunning spell at him while Toothless sent out another fireball. Jack blocked the fireball and waved his staff to trap Toothless's legs in ice but was not quite fast enough to dodge Merida's spell which knocked him off balance as she landed beside him and pointed her wand at him again.

'Impedimenta!' She cried shooting out a green stream of light which just grazed Jack's side as he dodged, slowing him but not stopping

him. 'Now's yer only shot Hiccup!' She called to the Berkian who was already running towards Jack.

Jack tried to swing his staff and hit Hiccup with an ice spell but was too slow, allowing Hiccup to get close enough to grab his arm holding the staff and stop it moving. He reached his other hand around the back of Jack's neck and pulled him forward, pressing their lips together before Jack, Pitch or anyone knew what he was doing.

Immediately Jack's body went rigid and he began to try and push Hiccup away again, desperately fighting to end the kiss but Hiccup held him tightly and would not let go. The kiss was like electricity in Jack's body, reaching deep into his mind as a burning wave.

On the night of the Yule Ball the Nightmare had felt this same force between them on a weaker level and had reacted instinctively, forcing Jack to push the Berkian away before the burning continued. This time, however, there was no escape for it as the power of the kiss burnt its black sand into nothing. Pitch felt the same force in the last moments of his Nightmare and staggered at the psychic whiplash before screaming in fury as the last of the Nightmare burned away and cut his connection from Jack's mind completely.

As it died Jack felt his own control returning and stopped fighting Hiccup who pulled away himself to look into Jack's eyes, which had returned to their crystal blue.

'You're back,' he stated happily.

'Yeah,' Jack replied in a whisper.

Smiling, they kissed again, Jack dropping his staff as he curled his arms around Hiccup's back while all around them the ice wall he had created melted and collapsed. In the end they stood together in the open as the rest of the team got up and saw what had happened. Rapunzel and Flynn caught one another's eyes and shared their own kiss while Fred and Merida stood to the side.

'Well, we wouldn't want to miss out,' Fred said, staring straight ahead.

'Nope,' Merida agreed as she wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him fiercely which he reciprocated so enthusiastically that he lifted her off the ground.

'So,' Fergus said to George and Angelina from the crowd, 'I suppose you'll be wantin' ta come for dinner.'

'Fergus!'

'What? I'm only askin''

Jack and Hiccup meanwhile had ended their kissing, for now at least, and looked at the other two couples who turned to face them.

'Well, I guess you guys are a little surprised,' Jack said awkwardly as he curled his fingers between Hiccup's.

'Not really mate.'

'Pretty obvious to me,'

'Yeah, we kind of figured.'

'Ye were both so obvious I'm surprised it took ye so long.'

****Holy hell this was a long chapter, good job getting through it :)****

****Well, I can only hope that the wait was worth it and you enjoyed the first proper Hijack moment.****

****And I'm sorry to say that this is the beginning of the end. After this chapter we've definitely crossed the half-way point** **in the story and are now heading inevitably to its end O.o****

****Until the next chapter have a good week and thanks for the amazing reviews :D****

21. The Results

****The Results****

In the two days between the Third Task and the end of term the news about the appearance of the Dark Council began to spread like wildfire as the Guardians contacted the Ministry and the _Daily Prophet_ to warn them of the oncoming threat. Meanwhile the six were sent to St Mungo's to deal with the injuries they had sustained during the attack.

Jack had escaped with only minor cuts and bruises from Pitch's spells which were healed overnight with ease while Hiccup had to wait an additional few hours with an foul smelling orange paste rubbed into a large burn he had received on his left shoulder, it would usually have been easier to heal but the dragon flame made the wound slightly harder to heal.

At first the healers at the hospital believed Merida would quickly make a full recovery but were surprised again and again as the cut that Mordu had left on her arm refused to heal from any magical remedy. Fred, however, was even worse off.

'I'm sorry but there is nothing we can do to restore your eye,' a nurse had told him and Merida after the first night. 'These are cursed wounds and won't heal. They'll be like the scars an unturned werewolf will leave if they scratch you. I'm sorry but we can't do more.'

'It's alright,' Fred said with slightly forced cheeriness as he scratched at the skin around his new eye-patch which concealed the damaged socket beneath, 'At least my eye match's my dad's ear. Now all we need to do is curse mum's nose and Roxanne's mouth off and we'll have the whole set.'

Laughing slightly, Merida told Fred, 'The eye-patch suits you. Ye look like a real warrior,' before kissing him on the cheek.

Rapunzel and Flynn had got off most lightly from their abduction by

returning with only minor scratches from Gothel, which was a shame considering their subsequent fight with Jack fractured Rapunzel's arm and broke one of Flynn's ribs but otherwise they were unharmed and quickly healed. Even so, on the second night Flynn woke to see Rapunzel reading quietly in her bed, pulling lightly at her now shorter brown hair.

'Alright, what's the matter,' he said to her smoothly from his own bed, making her jump and turn to look at him.

'It's nothing,' Rapunzel said hurriedly but Flynn was a step ahead of her.

'No it's not. I can tell you're worried about something so spill it, what's the problem?'

Rapunzel hesitated a moment before sighing and saying, 'I should have been able to help you, all of you. If I hadn't lost my healing powers you wouldn't need to be lying here, Fred wouldn't have to wear an eye-patch for the rest of his life.'

'If anything that's my fault,' Flynn returned soothingly, 'After all _I_ was the one who cut off your hair, and Fred doesn't blame you. If anything I think he's kind of enjoying the attention.'

Rapunzel laughed a little at that and soon she and Flynn had turned away from recent events and talked about anything else that grabbed their attention. When they finally turned their lights off and lay down to sleep an hour later Rapunzel felt marginally better but still something else nagged at her from the back of her mind.

It's not just about losing your healing powers is it? It's what it means, because without your powers you're no longer the Sun's Child and that means you aren't like the others anymore. You're don't share being special anymore.

'_Shut up_, ' Rapunzel whispered back and the voice quieted.

* * *

><p>On the second day of the six's time at St Mungos, after the group had been healed enough to return home, they were visited by the Guardians for the first time since their stay.<p>

'We have come to arrangement,' North informed them as they all sat down.

'What arrangement?' Jack had asked worriedly as he looked from him to Professor Whittler.

'We've decided it's too dangerous for you and your families to remain in your homes over the holidays,' Toothiana said quickly, 'The Dark Council will be wary for a while but they won't stay like that, eventually they'll try to attack you again. So the Guardians have begun to set up safe houses around the country and we've planned with your parents to move you to the safest one we've got.'

'The new headquarters for the Guardians,' Bunnymund answered, 'we've just been discussing it with your parents and we all agree that it is the safest, most impregnable place there is right now.'

'Where?' Flynn asked with a touch of awe in his voice.

'Dunbroch castle,' Fergus said as he leaned forward.

'My home? Why?' Merida had asked with disbelief.

'For a start, it's big enough to house all of ye,' Whittler acknowledged, 'The six of ye can share rooms up in the castle proper and yer families can stay in houses in the little village outside. Dunbroch castle was built ta be a near impregnable fortress that Black would have some trouble gettin' into, but it's even safer now thanks to you Merida.'

'Why me?'

'Ye released the powers of the True Queen durin' yer fight with Mordu, or at least ye've started to. The land that was ruled by yer family will now keep ye all safe as long as ye stay in the boundaries of the old Dunbroch territories. Any dark wizard who tries ta get ye while yer there will be thrown back out by the powers still in the land.'

'Nearly time to go,' North acknowledged as he looked up at the clock on the wall of the ward and began to search through the large pockets in his scarlet robes. Eventually he pulled out a small, wooden sphere from one of them with a triumphant noise before presenting it to Fred. 'A gift,' he said simply as the Guardians began to collect what little of the six's belongings they'd taken to the ward in preparation for travelling to the castle.

'What is it?' Merida asked as she craned around Fred to get a good look at the ball in Fred's hand. It was perfectly smooth and, knowing North's notorious skill for manufacturing magical items, perfectly round as well. It had been made from a dark wood that seemed to match the colour of Fred's wand and when Merida bent closer to look at it, the thing swivelled on its own in Fred's palm to stare directly back at her through the iris and pupil carved into its side which made her and Fred jump together.

'For your eye,' North pointed out, motioning to his own so Fred would get the point, 'I got idea from famous Auror Mad-Eye Moody.'

'Thanks professor,' Fred replied as he carefully examined the eye, 'I think I'll keep the eye-patch though, I don't want people to start calling me Mad-Eye Weasley.'

With that, Fred bent his head backwards, lifted his eye-patch with one hand and fitted the fake eye in with the other which made a disturbing popping noise as it went into place that made the others shudder. He sat back up and the others watched as his new eye swivelled in its socket, turning to each of them before the pupil disappeared into the back of Fred's head.

'Cool!' he said appreciatively as the eye fixed into place staring behind him, 'I can see everything, it even sees through the back of my head.'

'It must be easy for the thing considering your brain's too small to get in the way Mad-Eye,' Flynn joked as he flipped the eye-patch back

down over the revolving fake.

* * *

><p>Further Mayhem for the Ministry_

_The Ministry of Magic has yet again been stumped by another series of attacks throughout the country. Since the recent breakout from Azkaban that occurred on August 10__th__ multiple attacks on both magical and muggle communities have been made more and more frequently across the country. Rumours have it that these attacks are being caused by a new group of dark wizards calling themselves the Dream Eaters and are supposedly led by three new dark lords, two of whom being named Mordu the Demon Bear and Mother Gothel while the third is the infamous dark wizard Pitch Black who himself escaped from Azkaban onâ€|_

Hiccup threw the newspaper away to one side of the bed with a sigh, every day it seemed that the Council was trying to gain ground or more supporters and still the Ministry was unable to stop them. He looked down at the sleeping figure of Jack beside him, the morning sun glinting off the boy's pale face and white hair as he slept, his bare chest rising slightly with every breath. Hiccup himself wore a pair of pyjamas as, even under a mess of blankets, Jack's body was cool to the touch and the added layer helped keep Hiccup comfortable at night.

He was about to snuggle back in with Jack for another half hour's rest when a loud popping made him sit bolt upright and startle Jack into consciousness.

'Huh, whazzit!' He half-mumbled, half-yelled in surprise as he tumbled out of bed to the laughter of the Fred and Flynn who had just apparated into their room.

'You know, just because you two can do magic now doesn't mean you can just pop into our room whenever you want,' Hiccup said peevishly as Jack struggled from the floor.

'I don't see why not, this is _my _room as well after all,' Flynn reminded him cheerfully. When the six had first moved into the Dunbroch castle they'd been paired into rooms by Elinor who ensured Merida and Rapunzel shared a room while Jack and Hiccup did not, she and Fergus weren't stupid after all. Unfortunately for them the arrangement hadn't lasted a single night thanks to Merida's power as the True Queen had given her a growing knowledge of the lands and the castle within them. This knowledge included a detailed understanding of the secret passages that allowed the six to switch bedrooms without anyone realising.

'Anyway, we were made to come and get you by the girls,' Fred added as Jack hastily found and pulled on his blue hoodie, 'Hogwarts letters have arrived, which included something important I think, but I can't quite rememberâ€|'

'Our OWLS results!' Hiccup said in horror as realisation dawned.

'Oh yeah, that was it,' Fred smirked as the two boys rushed out of the room before he and Flynn disappeared and reappeared in the dining hall beside Merida and Rapunzel to watch the boys running down

the stone steps to meet them.

'Hurry up you two,' Flynn joked as they rushed to the table and grabbed their letters alongside Rapunzel and Merida.

There was a moment's pause as the four stared down at their envelopes before opening them slowly and pulling out the parchment that contained their OWLS marks. Nobody in the room spoke as the four read their results until Fred interrupted their silent detachment with a questioning 'Well?'

'Only failed Divination and History of Magic and who cares about them?' Merida said happily as she read the parchment over again, 'I even got an 'O' in Defence Against the Dark Arts _and_ Transfiguration!'

'That's brilliant!' Fred cheered along as he pulled her into a hug.

'Passes in everything but History of Magic and I got an 'O' in Defence Against the Dark Arts too,' Jack beamed as he proudly showed Hiccup his results, 'Look, I even got an 'Acceptable' in Herbology.'

'That's great,' Hiccup returned encouragingly.

'Your turn now,' Jack told him as he playfully snatched at Hiccup's parchment which was quickly held out of arm's length.

'Okay, okay already,' Hiccup laughed as Jack tried to stretch around him, 'It's the same as you, passes in everything but History of Magic, although I only got an 'E' in Defence Against the Dark Arts.'

'You got an 'O' in Care of Magical Creatures though, I can tell,' Jack continued.

'How did you know?' Hiccup asked incredulously as he finally let in and gave Jack his results.

'Because I've seen you in that class for the last three years,' Jack reminded him as he kissed Hiccup on the cheek, 'There was no way you were getting anything less.'

'How about you Rapunzel?' Merida asked,, turning to the girl who had her back slightly turned to the others as she read over her results again.

'Oh, you know, I did alright,' she said without turning around.

'Yeah right,' Flynn scoffed as he took the parchment from her hands before she could hide it. 'Yep, I knew it. 'Outstanding' in everything other than an 'E' in Defence Against the Dark Arts and Divination. I knew you'd do better than "alright".'

'Ye got _'Exceeds Expectations' in _Divination_, ' Merida stated with surprise, 'How, I meanâ€¦|_how_?'

'Well, you know, I just remembered all the reading techniques. As

long as you do them right you get a good enough reading to pass,' Rapunzel explained in a slightly abashed tone.

'What is all this noise?' Elinor asked as she entered the room, looking disapprovingly at the messily stacked breakfast plates on the table which, after a moment, ordered themselves neatly out of sheer embarrassment. A moment later she spotted the group holding their pieces of parchment and realisation dawned on her face.

'Oh, let me see,' she said as she excitedly took Merida's results from her, ignoring an irritated cry of 'Mum!', and read them through quickly without looking up. 'Very well done,' she congratulated as she finished reading and pulled Merida into a large hug, 'I would have preferred ye get a better mark in History of Magic, I have tried ta help teach it to ye, but an 'O' in Transfiguration is nothing ta be unhappy about. I must tell yer father the good news, Fergus!'

With that she swept from the room to chase down Fergus, leaving the others standing around a little silently as they contemplated their results. Eventually Jack said, 'Well, I feel better.'

'Yeah, we're NEWT students now,' Hiccup agreed as he leaned into Jack for support as the pent up adrenalin that shot through his system at the mention of the results began to fade.

'You won't be feeling that way for long,' Fred told them as he put his arm round Merida, 'It's nothing but hell from here.'

'Yep, you've got nothing but long, painful hours of work ahead of you,' Flynn added cheerily as he leaned back in a chair.

'You're one to talk, this is your seventh year,' Rapunzel reminded him as she sat onto a chair and rested her feet on his legs, 'No matter how bad it is for us, it'll always be worse for you.'

* * *

><p>Along with their results the six had also received their new book lists for the coming year which meant that Elinor was no longer able to postpone a trip to Diagon Alley and so, after breakfast on the following Saturday, the six were sitting around the dining hall table, all of them except Merida carrying a bag of coins to pay for their supplies, waiting for the arrival of the ministry car that would be driving them to London.<p>

'But mum,' Merida protested on hearing the news, 'we're in Scotland; it'll take ages to drive ta Diagon Alley. Why can't we just use floo powder?'

'The floo networks bein' strictly regulated and the Leaky Cauldron has been taken off it for abusin' the new regulations,' her mother replied tersely, 'And the extra security is goin' ta meet us outside in Charing Cross anyway.'

'Security?' Merida asked back unbelievably, 'The Dark Council's not goin' ta jump out at us from behind a shop mum.'

'They managed to get to ye at Hogwarts didn't they?' Elinor replied in an angry tone, 'If that's the way ye goin' ta think of yer own

safety then maybe ye should stay home.'

'No, no. I want ta come,' Merida said hastily at the look in her mother's eyes. From then on she'd made sure she didn't say anything flippant about the Council while inside the Castle, even during the Saturday when they were all pilling into the ministry car. While it should have been impossible for a group of six students plus Elinor and Fergus to fit into a normal car, this one remained quite spacious with enough room for everyone to stretch themselves out comfortably.

'Here we are, sorry the traffic took so long,' the driver said half an hour after their departure as they pulled into Charing Cross road right outside the Leaky Cauldron. 'I'm to collect you as well, any idea how long that'll be?'

'An hour I think,' Elinor replied from her and Fergus's front seat which was the size of a sofa, 'Oh good, he's here.'

Mimicking Elinor, the six twisted around in their seats to look at the window at the figure standing in the doorway of the Leaky Cauldron. Hiccup's heart leapt at the sight of Gobber who was smiling cheerily at the muggle passers-by who were staring at him with undisguised horror. This was largely due to the fact that Gobber had taken his role as 'security' to heart and was sporting his detachable war axe in his socketed arm while his peg leg and stone tooth only added to his fearsome appearance, which was ruined slightly by the happy look on his face.

'Hello Hiccup,' he boomed, sweeping hiccup into a bone crushing one-armed hug the moment the boy stepped out of the car, 'I heard about yer OWLS, well done for Care of Magical Creatures. How's Toothless?'

'He's doing great,' Hiccup said, breathing heavily as Gobber let him back down, 'he's enjoying exploring the highlands, I have to keep making sure we won't accidentally fly over a muggle village in case he goes down to explore it. How's dad doing without me to keep him out of trouble?'

'Aye, he's doin' well enough but he says it's too peaceful without ye and that wee dragon of yours causin' chaos every five minutes.'

'Will you lot all get in,' Dean, the barman of the Cauldron, hissed from the open door of the inn, 'You're making the muggles suspicious!'

Looking around the group realised he had a point, people across the street were all staring at them, specifically at Fred, Hiccup and Gobber who must have looked very strange together, with their unusual limbs and eye-patch. They all hurried in quickly and shut the door behind them to block the street from getting any better a look.

'Now that you're here I don't suppose a drink'll be out of the question,' Dean continued hopefully as he walked through the mostly empty inn, with a few minor exceptions sitting huddled over their glasses.

'Sorry Dean, Hogwarts business only,' Gobber returned firmly. Dean

nodded disappointedly and let them through to the little courtyard in the back where Fergus raised his wand and tapped a few select bricks on the wall which opened to reveal the entrance to a winding cobbled street.

Diagon Alley had transformed from a once bustling, beautiful place with shops full of brightly coloured books and magical items to a more sombre atmosphere where the shop windows had been covered over with Ministry posters. The posters mainly had blown up versions of advice to the public concerning "Safety and Security" or were large black and white photos of criminals known to be working with the Council. There were many faces the six didn't recognize from the identification photos in the Daily Prophet and were probably a new batch of recently escaped criminals or confirmed allies only just discovered. Pitch Black's face, all cunning and disdain, was hung from the window of Flourish and Blotts and smiled down at the group as they went inside, leaving Gobber standing guard at the door.

Usually inside Flourish and Blotts there was a large commotion as people and students tried to grab the books they were after before they went out of stock. Now, however, the small crowd of people currently in the shop moved slowly around, sticking in groups as if they feared an attack at any moment.

'This is what it was like durin' the Second Wizardin' War,' Fergus muttered to the others as they walked over to the shelves to find the right books. Fergus and Elinor disappeared into one aisle of shelves to search for a book that Elinor had been meaning to get herself, leaving the six to gather their textbooks on their own.

'Well, well. I didn't think I'd see you lot here. I thought you'd all be cowering in some hidden shack somewhere,' a smooth and immediately recognisable voice said behind them.

'Oh good, glad to see you're here Mulcaster,' Rapunzel sighed without turning, focusing instead on an interesting book that she had pulled from the shelves.

Mulcaster, accompanied by a few cronies who stood slightly back from him, glared angrily at the back of Rapunzel's head and her unrecognisable short, brown hair. 'Now I get why you didn't want us to cut your stupid hair when we offered you,' he sneered disdainfully, 'you didn't want to walk around with a hair colour that matched your mudblood status did you?'

Merida, Jack and Fred turned immediately, pulling out their wands and pointing them, alongside Jack's staff, squarely at Mulcaster's chest while Flynn, Hiccup and Rapunzel drew theirs in readiness.

'You take that back Mulcaster,' Merida spat angrily as Mulcaster's cronies began to pull out their wands while Mulcaster stood motionlessly.

'Oh dear, are you really going to stun me little Gryffindor,' Mulcaster chuckled in what the six were sure he thought was an intellectual manner, 'I didn't think you'd be so willing to get expelled.'

'I still have permission to use magic outside school,' Jack told

Mulcaster gruffly as he gripped the whit handle of his staff tightly. 'The Ministry never took it away when I joined Hogwarts.'

'You wouldn't want to go and do anything you'd regret Jack, jinxing your captain would definitely lead to your expulsion from the team,' Mulcaster laughed as he revealed a pin attached to the side of his black coat decorated in green and silver with the image of a snake in the centre, a quidditch captain badge. Jack stared furiously at the badge for a moment before reluctantly pulling back his staff and spinning it nonchalantly onto his shoulder.

'Alright, you've made your point, you can buzz off now,' he said through gritted teeth as the other relaxed their grip on their wands, understanding Jack's forced situation and loathing it as much as him.

'You've had a pretty easy time in Hogwarts,' Mulcaster gloated at all of them, 'It's a good thing times are changing, soon you'll get to learn what the real world is like.'

With that, Mulcaster and his mates strutted off, grins of victory lighting their faces and leaving the six to glower at their backs before turning angrily back to their textbooks. After they had all gathered the necessary books they headed back out to the main part of the shop and found Elinor and Fergus already at the counter, buying their own stack of items. The group hurried over to join them and soon they were all heading out of the shop again.

'What on Earth was takin' ye all so long?' Elinor asked curiously as they hefted the full bags between them.

'Oh, nothing,' Hiccup replied calmly as he squeezed Jack's hand reassuringly, 'we just got a little lost in the book stacks is all.'

'It wouldn't have anythin' ta do with Craven Mulcaster and his boy lookin' smug as they passed us would it?' Fergus asked pointedly as he peered behind him at the teenagers.

'They always look smug,' Jack reminded him with a grim look on his face, 'Although sometimes I think they're just constipated and trying not to show it.'

They made their back through Diagon Alley, past a couple of boarded up windows of shops where the owners had either gone missing or simply left out of fear. As they re-entered the Leaky Cauldron they noticed that all except Dean had left, leaving the inn as empty and hollow as Diagon Alley now felt.

* * *

><p>The Hogwarts Express rocked gently as it swept across the open fields under the strong mid-day sun. The six had managed to squeeze themselves into a single carriage and were lounging along the seats. They'd run out of things to talk about unusually early on, although they blamed that on the fact that they had spent the whole summer together and so had spent far more time in each other's company than usual, now they sat in companionable silence together as they drifted in their own thoughts.<p>

Merida and Flynn were resting their heads together and half-drowsing, half-thinking, Merida's hair providing enough cushioning for the both of them. In her drowsy thoughts Merida wondered about what they were going to do in the oncoming war, as it seemed pretty clear that there was going to be one if it hadn't started already. The question that was most prominent in her mind was, should she and the other tell Fred and Flynn the whole truth about them? The prophecy? Their unique gifts? Everything? She didn't want to risk Fred getting hurt from learning the truth, but she didn't want to keep it in the dark either.

Rapunzel leaned against the window as Flynn slept dreamily beside her, resting her forehead on the cool surface of the glass. Rapunzel thought about seeing Mulcaster and his father on the platform before getting on. Although she had barely ever seen the man except in brief flashes at Platform 9 ¾ like that Rapunzel recognized Craven Mulcaster immediately. She had seen his face repeatedly in those strange dreams she'd had that seemed to have some basis in reality, or at least used to have before her hair had been cut. What was strange was, even though they were only dreams, Rapunzel couldn't help but distrust Craven Mulcaster, as if her dreams were real images of him working for the Council. But still, there was that dream about the witch who went missingâ€¦

Jack and Hiccup sat, their fingers knotted loosely together as they let their foreheads rest gently against one another.

'How are you feeling?' Hiccup whispered so as not to disturb the others.

'Pretty good,' Jack grinned back, 'At least the Quidditch season is back on this year.'

'How are you feeling about that?' Hiccup asked with concern.

'Mulcaster can threaten me all he wants, the others won't let him kick me off without forcing him to resign first. What do you think he meant when he said times were changing?'

'Either he's picked up a newspaper in the last few weeks or he's just learned how to tell the time. It's a good bet either way,' Hiccup joked which made Jack laugh happily.

'Oh man,' he said, still laughing, 'I think I love you.'

'I love you too,' Hiccup whispered back before kissing him happily.

'Oy you two, no public displays of affection in close quarters,' Merida's voice rang over the quiet stupor, making them all laugh.

* * *

><p>I'm back! :)

**Sorry it's been such a long break, the Christmas holiday was very busy and I had a bit of writer's block, but we're rolling on again now. **

****Anyway, hope you guys had a good Christmas and I hope you like the chapter.****

****Until next time, have a good week :D****

22. The Argument

****The Argument****

'He can be such a jerk sometimes!' Hiccup snarled furiously as he paced back and forth across the Hospital Wing office while Rapunzel was mundanely grinding nightlock in a pestle for Justin Corbin's potion, the boy had accidentally eaten undiluted bubotuber pus in Herbology when a tuber had popped in his face and the current rasping noises coming from his bed didn't sound promising.

'This is true but I'm not sure it's anything to get upset over,' Rapunzel returned while Pascal chirruped in agreement on her shoulder.

'He was just being soâ€¦stubborn about it,' Hiccup tried to explain as he deflated slightly from his anger, although not entirely.

'He's not the only one,' Rapunzel chuckled as she dipped the crushed herb into her small cauldron which turned a light shade of lilac. 'I'll just go and give this to Justin and then you can explain how this all started,' she continued as she stepped out of the office and hurried over to Justin's bed.

* * *

><p>'I don't see how it's my fault,' Jack argued irritably as he trudged along the third floor corridor.<p>

'Uh huh,' Merida said as she walked beside him, looking out the window at the snow covered quidditch pitch and wondering whether Fred would have to cancel practice that night. Considering Christmas was getting so close he probably would, just to keep everyone on their toes, the ones that hadn't been taken by frostbite at any rate.

'I mean, is it such a strange thing to expect someone to tell you after knowing them for six years?'

'Mm hmm, sure,'

'Are you even listening to me?'

'What?' Merida asked, turning back to Jack and focusing her mind to the problem at hand.

'Have you heard anything I said?' Jack asked with a mixture of annoyance and amusement.

'Not really, was it somethin' important?'

'Hiccup and I had a fight,' Jack said with exaggerated patience.

'Oh, just give it time, apologise and move on. That's what Fred and I

do when we fight,' Merida suggested, 'Make a romantic gesture, that sort of thing.'

'It's not that simple,' Jack replied stubbornly.

'Then tell me the problem!' Merida said, exasperated.

'It started in Care of Magical Creatures,'

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><p>'Mornin' all!' Gobber had cried as the Care of Magical Creatures NEWT class arrived. Everyone had been wrapped in their thick winter robes to ward off the chill of the winter weather except for Hiccup, who wore his Viking furs, and Jack, who never needed extra insulation. They were holding hands as they crunched through the snow but the alternating bursts of wind and snow made it difficult to talk, and anyway, Jack hadn't been in a very talkative mood for the last few days.<p>

'If ye'll all follow me, we've got ta go a little into the edges of the forest,' Gobber continued, pointing behind him to a path they were clearly supposed to follow.

'We're not supposed to go into the forest!' One Ravenclaw boy squeaked as he looked tremulously into the shadows of the trees behind Gobber.

'Not ta worry we're only goin' a short way,' Gobber reassured the trembling boy, 'Anyway it's warmer in there, the tree keep most of the snow and wind out ye see.'

With that there was a quick swarm for the cover of the trees as the class eagerly dashed for the promised safety and warmth, even the Ravenclaw boy went, albeit grudgingly.

'Any idea what he's going to show us?' Jack asked Hiccup curiously as they wandered through the trees, the sounds of the wind fading behind them.

'No idea, whatever it is it must like darker places, otherwise we wouldn't have to go in here,' Hiccup answered as he craned his neck around the class and considerable width of Gobber to see if he could catch a glimpse of the new animal they were to study.

'Soon be there,' Gobber called over to the group as the trees grew a little closer together. A moment later they emerged into a wide clearing in the forest and many of the class gasped at the sight of a dead cow in the centre. The Ravenclaw boy who had been afraid to enter the forest grew paler at the sight of it and shifted along slightly to be closer to the rest of the class.

'This is going to be interesting,' Scott Mclean, a Slytherin friend of Jack's, whispered to them while not taking his eyes from the cow carcass.

'I'll just give them a call and they'll be here any minute,' Gobber said to the class before turning his head to the forest beyond and giving of a terrible shriek that made several class members jump with terror.

'What the hell makes that kind of noise?' A Slytherin girl whimpered in terror as Gobber made a second shriek.

A moment later her question was answered when Gobber made to give a third cry but stopped as he spotted something appearing in the distant trees and pointed it out. The crowd stared with either interest or fear at the spot Gobber had motioned to but Jack couldn't see anything appearing from the forest.

'I don't see anything,' he said doubtfully to Hiccup but saw that the boy was looking intently at the spot Gobber had pointed at. He turned slowly, as if following an invisible creature, to end up looking into the centre of the clearing at the cow carcase and Jack looked again in the hopes that, this time, something would appear.

'Uh, sir? What are we supposed to be seeing?' Scott asked Gobber as he too, along with most of the class, looked around the clearing in confusion.

In answer Gobber pointed to the cow carcase which, to Jack's horror, was now being pulled apart by chunks which vanished in the air a moment later. 'What's doing it?' he asked with interest as more chunks ripped themselves away from the cow on the other side of its flank.

'Thestrals,' Gobber explained, 'They're an interestin' species. Ye can only see them if ye've seen death, gives them a nasty reputation. _Can_ anyone see them by the way?'

There was a second's pause as everyone looked around at one another before a Ravenclaw girl raised her hand.

'My grandmother,' she said by way of explanation before falling silent to watch the invisible creatures.

Everyone stared at her for a moment longer before looking away again, only to turn back as another hand went into the air, Hiccup's.

'Ah, I know _you_ can Hiccup, ye've helped me take care of this lot,' Gobber reminded Hiccup as Jack stared in surprise at his boyfriend. 'Now anyway, interestin' creatures thestrals, great sense of direction and very peaceful believe it or not.'

The lesson continued as Gobber explained the traits of thestrals and their appearance to those unburdened with seeing them while Jack and Hiccup stood listening to him in silence as Hiccup watched the thestrals herd he had taken care of and Jack stood with his mind racing. When the lesson had ended the class walked back along the beaten path through the forest in little groups, talking about the lesson or what they were going to have for lunch. Hiccup and Jack split off together and walked a little further ahead of the rest.

'How come you never told me about this?' Jack asked with a slight hint of accusation.

'I don't know, it never really came up,' Hiccup said quietly, not looking at Jack.

'We've known each other for six years,' Jack argued, 'We've been together for nearly six months and you've never told me you've seen someone die. I've told you all the personal stuff that's happened to me.'

'It's not that simple,' Hiccup returned hotly, turning slightly red.

'Not that simple? You could at least have mentioned the horseless carriages weren't horseless!' Jack yelled in irritation.

'I don't have to tell you everything about my personal life!' Hiccup yelled back.

'I thought I was a part of your personal life!' Jack returned vehemently, 'Then again I shouldn't be surprised, you've never told me what you do when you sneak off into the Forbidden Forest!'

'Sneak! Is that what you think I do?' Hiccup asked with indignation, 'No wonder you're called the Winter Trickster if you're able to fool yourself this badly!'

With that Hiccup stormed off back to the castle, increasing his pace and leaving Jack standing alone on the path, fuming. When he turned around Jack saw half the class staring at him as they had stopped a short distance away to listen to their row.

'What?' Jack yelled angrily at them before summoning the winds with a flick of his staff and flying into the air to get as far away from the forests as possible.

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><p>'Wow, subtlety isn't yer strong point is it,' Merida said sarcastically as they turned a corner onto the Grand Staircase.<p>

'Hilarious,' Jack replied, 'but seriously, don't you think it's weird he never told us. I mean, he literally helped save my life in our first year, you'd think that'd break some personal barriers, let alone the whole prophecy thingâ€|'

'I can see thestrals,' Merida interrupted conversationally as she took a keen interest in a scratch along the bannister of the moving staircase.

'What!' Jack cried in surprise.

'Yeah, my dad's huntin' party came back one night. I never found out what had got them but one of them was hurt pretty badly. I was six and I was curious so I snuck down ta get a peek and the guy justâ€|stopped as I looked in through the door. When my mum found out she grounded me for two months,' Merida continued.

'Why didn't you ever say anything?' Jack asked, deflating as he watched Merida.

'It's not really somethin' ye talk about. Hiccup and I never have at least. What I want ta know is why yer actin' so strange about it, yer

usually so easy goin'?' Merida asked quizzically at Jack who looked at his staff rather than meet her stare. 'Come on, I know somethin's botherin' ye or ye'd never have snapped at Hiccup like that,' Merida urged encouragingly.

Jack hesitated for a moment but began to answer as they stepped onto the next floor before nearly running into Mulcaster who sneered angrily at him.

'Watch where you're going Frost, I know it's hard for someone as uncoordinated as you but do try,' he leered as he passed the scowling Jack and Merida down the stairs they'd just come up. Something caught Merida's eye and she was unsure what until she realised what was odd about the group of people around Mulcaster.

'Isn't that Amanda Bones? And, look, there's some of Rapunzel's Ravenclaw friends and aren't those Hufflepuffs too? Why is Mulcaster hanging out with people other than Slytherin's, they don't seem too happy about it?' She asked curiously as she watched the odd group disappear from sight before turning back to Jack whose jaw was still clenched tightly.

'What's the matter?' She asked worriedly at the sight and Jack told her.

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><p>Rapunzel was redressing a patient's bandages when Jack and Merida burst into the hospital wing, or at least when Merida through open the doors with enough force to make them bang off the walls. With a flick of her wand Rapunzel finished the redressing and stalked over to them.<p>

'You realise this is supposed to be a place of healing,' she told Merida, 'It would help if you didn't burst any of the patient's eardrums.'

'Sorry Rapunzel, we're lookin' for Hiccup,' Merida told her hurriedly.

'He left about a quarter of an hour ago,' Rapunzel told them, looking sternly at Jack, 'He was complaining about you making such a big deal over things and I kind of agree.'

'Where did he go?' Jack asked urgently, 'I want to explain thingsâ€|and apologise.'

'You'll have to wait until he gets back then,' Rapunzel sighed wearily, 'He's gone to take Toothless into the Forbidden Forestâ€|wait, where do you think you're going?'

But it was too late as Jack had already hurried off back down the stairs and disappeared from sight. Rapunzel made a motion to chase after him but Merida shook her head.

'Don't worry about him,' she assured the girl, 'he's just feelin' a bit silly now he's got everythin' out in the open.'

'Got what out in the open?' Rapunzel asked in confusion as she ushered Merida into the Hospital Wing office to keep their

conversation more private from the bored ears of the patients. Sitting down with Merida at the small round table she waited expectantly for Merida to start her explanation.

'Well, ye seeâ€|'

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><p>As Jack left the castle at a run he swung his staff around and summoned the winds beneath him, rising into the air and rocketing forward over the trees of the Forbidden Forest. He had no idea where Hiccup actually went when he was in the Forest but even so he only hesitated a moment before choosing an area to search and heading off through the trees.<p>

As he flew deeper into the Forest he was forced to fly lower as the tops of the trees grew thicker with branches, many still covered in foliage against the oncoming winter. He circled around the same clump of trees for a few minutes in the hopes of hearing the sound of Toothless' flapping wings or Hiccup's voice but no sound came to him. By the time he'd searched a fourth section of the forest he was unsure of how long he'd been searching, time seemed to be going weird under the trees although it looked as if it were getting dark.

'Hiccup!' Jack called for the hundredth time, a little worry creeping into his voice as the shadows lengthened along the trees. Only a little though, he knew he could probably handle anything that roamed the Forest at night, probably.

'Hiccup, where are you?' Jack called again wearily; maybe he'd gone back to the castle ages ago and was even now laughing about him with Merida and Rapunzel.

'Jack? What are you doing here?' Hiccup's voice called over to him incredulously. Sighing with relief Jack motioned the winds to land him in a small opening between the trees where he saw Hiccup sitting with Toothless, resting his back against the dragon's warm scales.

'Don't you know how dangerous it is to go into the woods?' Hiccup asked with irritation, 'You could have been hurt!'

'You know I'm not really one for rules,' Jack replied, rubbing the back of his neck with a cheeky grin on his face. 'Although it's nice to see you still care if I get hurt,' he added cautiously.

'Well I wouldn't want something to rip you a new one before I had the chance,' Hiccup retaliated, annoyed that he was smiling slightly.

'Iâ€|I wanted to say sorry about that,' Jack continued apologetically, 'I shouldn't have expected you to tell me something like that.'

'Why were you getting so draconic about it anyway?' Hiccup asked. 'Sorry bud,' he added to Toothless who had looked up and made a curious purring at the mention of the word draconic.

'That's something I need to talk to you about,' Jack replied edging

closer, 'Can I sit?'

Rolling his eyes Hiccup scooted over slightly to allow more room along Toothless' side who growled welcomingly at Jack as the boy leaned his back along the dragon's dark hide before resting his head against a patch of recently charred grass.

'So?' Hiccup asked, not unkindly.

'It's Mulcaster,' Jack explained, 'he finally did it. A couple days ago we were at quidditch practise like normal and Mulcaster was telling the team the new manoeuvres he wanted to try out. Well, he started talking about how I'd not been following his plan in the last match, which was stupid because it practically made it impossible to catch the snitch.'

'And anyway, you won the game,' Hiccup defended, forgetting he was mad at Jack for the moment, 'I should know, I get the best view of the pitch with Rapunzel up in the commentator's box.'

'Yeah but the thing was I _"wasn't following the wishes of my Captain"_ ' Jack replied, mimicking Mulcaster's drawl. 'Even when the others backed me up he wouldn't listen, just kept saying I should stick with the programme and I said he came up with stupid game plans anyway. Well, he smiled at that because he'd got me; we're not supposed to talk to any team member with anything less than mutual respect. So he threw me off the team and there's nothing anyone can do to complain about it.'

'He did what!' Hiccup yelled angrily, 'I don't believe it, for a start Rapunzel and I should have been informed. We're commentators andâ€|oh, sorry.'

'Don't be,' Jack returned, smiling, 'It's nice to see you on my side.'

'Well, at least it explains why you've been so moody lately,' Hiccup mused as he leaned back against Toothless. 'I guess I should explain a few things as well,' he continued, without turning his eyes from the dark canopy above.

'You don't have to tell me anything if you don't want to,' Jack said hurriedly at the serious look on Hiccup's face.

'No, it's alright. There's not actually much to tell to be honest. When I was growing up in Burk, when we were still at war with the dragons, I used to dream of being out there with my dad, fighting the dragons off with one hand tied behind my back. So, I'd watch sometimes from my window andâ€|I don't know, I guess I saw some unlucky guy getting caught in the flames or something, it'd happen occasionally.'

'I'm sorry Hiccup,' Jack said, putting his arm around the boy's shoulder.

'It's okay; I mean I _am_ the Beast Tamer after all. I guess I couldn't really be that if I couldn't see every beast right?' Hiccup replied, leaning into Jack then sitting bolt upright again as a howl echoed over the trees.

'Huh, that sounded like a wolf,' Jack laughed as he tilted his head to see if he could catch the noise again.

'Uh oh,' he said worriedly.

'Uh oh?' Jack asked, 'what do you mean uh oh?'

'You should probably get out of here,' Hiccup said quickly as he stood up along with Toothless who accidentally knocked over Jack in his hurry to stand.

'Wait, what's going on?' Jack asked in alarm.

'Damn, it's too late,' Hiccup muttered as the howling grew closer and more frequent, as if the noise was being made from more than one mouth now. Turning to Jack he said, 'Okay, you know how there are all those rumours about werewolves in the Forest?'

'Yeah but I just thought it was a story. I mean, they're only wolves one night every month right? They wouldn't spend the rest of their time as humans in the Forestâ€|right?'

'Not exactly,' Hiccup said as the howling reached them and dark shapes flashed around the edges of the clearing, running in circles around the two and Toothless who seemed unperturbed by the creatures and watched them lazily. 'Just stay with Toothless and you should be fine,' Hiccup whispered to Jack as the animals stopped running around and Jack got a good look at them.

They were wolves, but not like any Jack had ever seen before. They were larger than an average wolf, coming up to about four feet tall, and their fur wasâ€|beautiful. There was no other word for it, the wolves were some of the most beautiful animals Jack had ever seen, beautiful in the same way fire and lightning are beautiful. Their fur was either silver or a dark brown and grey which all shone in the fading sunlight that glinted in through the trees but what was most interesting were their yellow and green eyes. Jack could honestly say that he'd never seen such intelligence in anything on four legs other than Toothless, in fact, if all you could see were the eyes, you would confuse them for human.

'Hi Gavin,' Hiccup said as he walked up to one of the wolves who was flanked by two others on each side that watched Hiccup patiently. 'This is a friend of mine. My, uh, mate. He doesn't mean any threat, trust me, and he's sorry for trespassing on your territory without warning, aren't you Jack?'

'Yeah, really sorry,' Jack said, trying to hold his staff as innocently as possible, a difficult trick for Jack, who never looked innocent.

The lead wolf looked at Hiccup for a moment, as if weighing him up, before leaning his head forward to rest in Hiccup's ready palm. A second later the beast descended past the boy down to Jack and Toothless who made a short growling sound which was returned, Jack couldn't tell whether that was good or bad. The wolf stopped a few metres away from Jack and regarded him with the same cool stare with those intelligent eyes. Jack began to reach forward with his empty hand to mimic Hiccup but the wolf growled lowly in a manner that politely suggested it would be unwise to move his hand any further.

Eventually the wolf sniffed Jack's robe once before turning and re-joining his pack which began to lie around the clearing, stretching and yawning while Hiccup walked back down to Jack and Toothless.

'That went well,' he said, 'I think Gavin likes you.'

'Oh good,' Jack said in a slightly dazed voice, '_Why_ Gavin?'

'Oh, that's just the name he likes to be called,' Hiccup explained, 'and believe me I had to go through a lot before I thought of that one.'

'But, these aren't actually werewolves right?' Jack said, almost hopefully, as he looked over the large pack, 'It's not even the full moon.'

'Yep, they're pure werewolf,' Hiccup surmised as he also gazed over the lazing animals, 'Their ancestors where werewolves who mated together while they were turned during the full moon. When that happens you get a litter of these wolves, they can't transform but they're as smart as normal men and they can even understand English. Dumbledore, one of the old headmasters, allowed the litters to be released into the Forest to join the pack whenever it happens apparently. The teachers never actually denied the rumours because it was a pretty good excuse to keep us out of the Forest.'

'Cool,' Jack replied happily.

'There is one thing though,' Hiccup added, almost as an afterthought, 'Could you not follow me in here again.'

'How come?' Jack asked in a hurt tone.

'If I wasn't here Gavin's pack might have tried to kill you, although they might not and simply assumed you were a stupid student, but even if they hadn't there are worse things out here Jack. The only reason I can move around is because I have Toothless and my powers as the Beast Tamer, I just want you to be safe is all.'

'Alright, I get the point,' Jack huffed dramatically, 'I'll just have to entertain myself by bugging the others more when you're not around.'

'Funny,' Hiccup smirked as he pulled Jack into a kiss. When they broke away Hiccup said, 'We'd better be getting back, Merida and Rapunzel must have wondered where we've gone off to.'

'Good idea,' Jack said, looking back once more at the werewolf pack, 'but there's no need to hurry.'

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><p>'Wow, I don't believe it!' Flynn said later that night as they sat around the small table in the Kitchens. Since their time as Tri-Team Champions Fred and Flynn had joined the four during their weekly visits to the house-elves for dinner and the six were currently finishing off the remains of their pudding while some of the house-elves hurried past them.<p>

'You'd never catch us treating our teammates like that,' Fred agreed, muffled somewhat by the chunk of apple pie he was eating.

'Damn right. We'd mutiny so fast ye wouldn't see what hit ye,' Merida said proudly, 'It'd be my bludger by the way.'

'Are you sure there isn't anything we can do?' Rapunzel asked Jack who shook his head sadly.

'Nah, and even if there was I wouldn't want to go back. Why would I when Mulcaster's leading the team?'

'I don't see why he got captaincy anyway,' Hiccup said angrily, 'you're a much better flyer than he is and everyone knows it.'

'Maybe we could just drop it for now,' Jack said firmly, tired of going over the subject.

'Good idea,' Fred said through a spray of crumbs before swallowing, 'What I want to know is why we don't run into those thestrals more often, if they're just wandering around the grounds we'd end up falling over one because we couldn't see it.'

'I think it might move out the way,' Flynn reminded him sarcastically, 'and I think they stay in the Forest when they're not pulling the carriages, they like darker spaces you know.'

'Wait, thestrals pull the carriages?' Rapunzel asked in surprise, dropping her spoon onto her plate while Pascal chirruped beside her, 'I always thought it was a charm.'

'Yeah I know, it's kinda weird isn't it? But Iâ€|Rapunzel? Are you okay?' Flynn asked worriedly at the look on Rapunzel's face, which had turned pale.

'I'm fine, I just...need to go to the library,' Rapunzel explained as she stood up and left without a glance backwards, leaving the others dumbfounded.

'Does anyone know what that was about?' Jack asked as he and Hiccup watched the door that lead out from the Kitchens with worry.

'No but I'll go find out,' Merida said, kissing Fred on the cheek as she got up and left after Rapunzel.

'I'll go too,' Flynn stated as he chased after the two, leaving the other three sitting around a much emptier table.

'Well we'll just let them sort it out then,' Hiccup said, throwing his hands in the air with exasperation.

'Soo,' Fred said casually, 'I don't suppose there's any way you'd tell me what the Slytherin's are planning for next year's match.'

'None,' Jack returned cheerily, 'the others don't deserve to get dragged down with Mulcaster.'

'Aw come one! Hiccup, you can persuade him right?'

'Sorry Fred,' Hiccup laughed as he squeezed Jack's hand, 'He's way too loyal to the team, even if they've got a troll for a captain.'

Merida caught up to Rapunzel half way along the first floor corridor, grabbing her arm and pulling her back with a cry of, 'Rapunzel will ye slow down and tell me what's goin' on.'

'I told you I'm fine,' Rapunzel argued without looking at Merida, 'I just thought of something I had to look up, you know me and books.'

'Nice try but we all know somethin's wrong with ye,' Merida replied which made Rapunzel flinch; it was so like what she'd heard in her head that it was a shock hearing it from Merida's mouth.

'Youâ€|you really think that?' she asked doubtfully as she looked up to stare into Merida's blue eyes.

'Of course, ye've been actin' a little odd ever since the summer. Ye keep starin' off into the distance when ye think know one's lookin' and ye've not been as cheery in the Hospital Wing as ye used ta be, so what's wrong.'

At that moment Flynn jogged around the corner and skidded to a halt at the sight of the two girls just close enough to hear the next few lines of conversation.

'It's just I'veâ€|I didn't see the thestrals,' Rapunzel finished lamely.

'Well, yeah. Why would ye?' Merida asked nonplussed as Flynn walked over to them, 'Ye were kept in a tower for ten years of yer life; it can't have been the most interestin' few years.'

'Yeah, you shouldn't feel bad about it Rapunzel,' Flynn reassured her, 'I mean most people wished they didn't after all.'

'That's not the point, I should have seen the thestrals this year,' Rapunzel continued belligerently.

'Why,' Merida asked, a little startled.

'How,' Flynn added with equal surprise.

'Well, because I saw you die,' Rapunzel told Flynn who gaped at her for a moment before realisation dawned in his eyes.

'Wait, Flynn's alive,' Merida stated, more for herself at this point than anyone else.

'But I wasn't,' Flynn corrected in a faraway voice as he and Rapunzel looked into each other's eyes, reliving that moment. 'I drifted away for a moment there before Rapunzel pulled me back with her powers.'

'I could feel it,' Rapunzel added as she grasped Flynn's hand for reassurance, 'His heart stopped and I just felt thisâ€|difference

that said he was gone. If I'd taken any longer I probably wouldn't have been able to bring you back at all.'

'But if ye've seen death, ye should see the thestrals. So, how's it possible ye can't,' Merida asked quietly as the new revelation sunk in.

'I don't know,' Rapunzel replied quietly, 'I just don't know.'

* * *

><p>Drama, Drama :P

If any of you are wondering, I named the werewolf Gavin as a tribute to Terry Pratchett's discworld series where there is also a wolf called Gavin in the book 'The Fifth Elephant'

I hope your enjoying where the chapters are going and, as ever, thanks for the reviews. :D

Have a good week :)

23. The Revelation

The Revelation

Kevin Ash sagged on his knees, the chains around his arms and legs clinking at his movement, his breath came heavily as he forced in racking gulps. _I should be with Jane and Melody right now_, he thought blearily, _it'll be Easter soon and I should be hiding the eggs for Melody to find, even if she says she's too old for it._

'So, that's the last of it,' the silky voice of Pitch Black said as he stepped away from Kevin, his Nightmares pawing at the ground around the man, who smelled of sweet fear to them. 'You were right Gothel; all we need is in the Ministry.'

'You'll never break in to the Department of Mysteries,' Kevin coughed, doubling over as he did while the witch chuckled happily to herself.

Ignoring him Black spoke to the hulking monster that had watched Kevin's 'interrogation' with emotionless black eyes, 'Do you believe that you can recreate it if we retrieve the recipe Mordu?'

'**Yes**,' the bear replied simply before adding, '**I'll even be able to accelerate the creation considering the limited uses it is required for. Then the witch can have her precious wish granted, so long as **_**I**_** get everything else we find in there**.**'

'Of course,' Black said as a Nightmare flew down to land at his side and seemingly whisper something in his ear. 'Ah, good. Terror has returned from Romania with our latest 'recruits'. If all has gone to plan, the Ministry will not even notice until it's too late.'

'You've got all you needed from me,' Kevin pleaded, 'now please, let

me go back to my family.'

At his words the witch called Gothel stood up angrily, pointed her wand, and cried, 'Crucio!'

Pain lanced through Kevin's body, forcing him to writhe in the floor, tangling in the chains that constricted him until the lashing pain ceased as suddenly as it had begun. A moment later a Dream Eater picked Kevin up from the ground and hauled him to face the Dark Council.

'I'm afraid we cannot rid ourselves of your presence quite yet,' Black said in a mock apologetic tone, 'You see, we have another use for you, although you won't be needed to do anything this time. And you were right before by the way.'

'About what?' Kevin asked without thinking, earning him a blow to the head from the Dream Eater holding him.

Smiling, Black bent down to look Kevin directly in the eyes and said, 'I don't want to break into the Department of Mysteries, not when we're going to own it soon enough.'

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><p>'Rapunzel, can we please have a break?' Merida begged as she stared, cross-eyed, at the large volume open in front of her titled Magical Shielding and Blinding: A history of illusory and glamorous magic.

She, Hiccup, Rapunzel and Flynn were all sitting around one of the Library's tables, each with a large stack of complicated and advanced books piled beside them. Jack and Fred had escaped with the excuse of giving Jack a chance for some quidditch practice now he was no longer a part of Slytherin team while Fred was starting to get edgy about the Gryffindor/Slytherin match that was approaching.

'What? We've only been researching for a couple of hours,' Rapunzel sniffed as she looked up from an even thicker book while Pascal lay on his back in a small patch of sunlight.

'We've been at this for several months!' Hiccup exclaimed, making Flynn wake with a start from the book he'd been dosing on for the past half hour. 'The year's nearly over Rapunzel and we still haven't found anything to explain why you can't see thestrals.'

'As much as I hate to admit it Rapunzel we may need to give up on this one,' Flynn said as he rubbed his drowsy eyes, 'You're just going to chalk it up to luck, or we could ask the teachers.'

'I told you I don't want to involve the Guardians in this,' Rapunzel replied. In truth she was also getting annoyed by the lack of a discovery, books had never failed her before, but she didn't want the Guardians to know strange things were happening to her now, after all they were busy enough as it was, dealing with the ever increasing power of the Dark Council.

'Well why are we even botherin' then?' Merida asked irritably, 'These books don't have the answers so why not go see the teachers. It's better than what we've been doin' so far. I'm done for today, so I

think I'm goin' ta enjoy the sunshine with Fred and Jack.'

With that Merida stomped out of the Library, the librarian giving her a nasty look for the unnecessary noise, before turning a corner and disappearing out of sight. Deciding that there was no point in continuing, the remaining three gathered the books and began to return them to their secluded dust-covered shelves.

'You know, I could go and ask Gobber if you like,' Hiccup said to Rapunzel as they left a few minutes later, 'I can be very subtle when I want.'

'Thanks Hiccup but the Guardians have enough to deal with without my problems getting in the way.'

'They'd want to know,' Flynn told her seriously as he slipped an arm around her waist, 'and it's not a problem, just...different.'

'Thanks Flynn,' Rapunzel replied gratefully, stroking his hand with her fingers while Pascal playfully climbed into the boy's hair.

'Anyway, I'll be going now,' Hiccup said awkwardly as he backed out the stone entranceway to the castle, 'Toothless and I were going to go out for a ride soâ€¦I'll see you later.'

Rapunzel giggled as the boy left and said, 'It's funny, he's fine being publicly affectionate with Jack but he's all shy whenever anyone else does it.'

'It's inconsiderate is what I think,' Flynn joked as he bent down and kissed Rapunzel.

* * *

><p>As ever Gobber's hut was empty while the forge beside it was glowing with the embers of banked fires and clanging with the sound of metal. As Hiccup drew near Toothless barrelled into him at top speed and flung him to the ground, licking his face as he did.<p>

'Aww, Toothless gerroff,' Hiccup laughed as he pushed at the dragon's chest to give himself room to wiggle free. The dragon sat back on his haunches to smile at Hiccup before scrabbling away and leaping onto the top of Gobber's hut and chuckling at Hiccup which the boy returned cheerfully as he stepped into Gobber's forge.

'Is that the human popsicle I heard outside?' Gobber asked as he dunked a shard of molten steel into a bucket of water which hissed and released a cloud of steam.

'Ha, ha very funny,' Hiccup returned sarcastically as he grabbed Toothless's riding gear from its' usual spot.

'How are yer apparatin' lessons goin?' Gobber returned. 'I wouldn't want ta hear ye splinched my good work again,' he continued, pointing at Hiccup's artificial leg.

'It only happened once,' Hiccup returned defensively, 'and yes, I'm

doing much better. I can apparate three times out of five now, so I'll be ready to get my test by the summer holidays.'

'I don't see why ye bother,' Gobber replied, 'ye've always preferred dragon ridin', hell ye'd be able ta convince any flyin' beast ta take ye if ye wanted.'

'That's not the point,' Hiccup returned stubbornly, 'It's a rite of passage, getting your apparition licence. Although, while we're on the subject of flying creatures, I was hoping I could ask you something.'

'Go ahead, I ain't stopping ye.'

'It's about thestrals,' Hiccup continued, hoping Rapunzel would forgive him if he found something useful, 'about the fact you can only see them after you've seen death.'

'Yes,' Gobber said carefully, wondering where Hiccup was going with this.

'Well, has there ever been a case where someone saw death but couldn't see thestrals?' Hiccup asked apprehensively to which Gobber burst out laughing.

'Only you, Hiccup, wold ask such a backward question,' Gobber said between fits of laughter. 'I've never heard of anythin' like that,' he continued when he'd calmed down, 'Seeing' death leaves a scar in the mind that can't be undone, the thestrals can only be seen through that scar as it were cause it warps yer view of the world a little. Why are ye askin'?'

'Oh, you know. Just natural curiosity,;' Hiccup blabbered as he backed out of Gobber's forge while trying to look innocent, 'Anyway, better go and take Toothless out for a ride. We'll be back in about an hour, uh, bye.'

With that he hurried off and strapped the saddle onto Toothless's back before climbing on and clicking his foot into place in the control stirrup. With a single leap Toothless shot into the sky and they were gone, merely a black spot in the sky that Gobber watched, shaking his head slightly at the random strangeness of Hiccup. All the time Hiccup's mind was racing, if you saw thestrals through a kind of scar then it might be possible to heal the scar and there was only one person Hiccup knew who might have that kind of healing power.

* * *

><p>Jack and Fred had stopped their game for the day as the afternoon sun rose to its' peak and the air became too hot to fly in, even with Jack's ice powers cooling the field. They were both drinking from bottles of butterbeer that they'd brought with them from the Kitchens and were debating whose favourite quidditch team was better when Merida walked onto the pitch.<p>

'Hi Merida,' Fred called suddenly without turning around, his hidden magical eye turning in its socket to see Merida coming.

'You don't have to show off all the time you know Mad-Eye,' Jack said

sarcastically as Merida laughed and sat down with them before taking a swig of Fred's butterbeer.

'Oy, get your own,' Fred said peevishly as he tried to keep the bottle out of Merida's reach.

'Come on! I'm thirsty,' Merida joked as she playfully grabbed for the bottle. 'So how's Mia Jack?' she asked cheerily when she and Fred had finally given up their playful struggle.

'Good, I've got her learning a new spell from our family book every week,' Jack beamed proudly, whether at his sister's advancement or his own cleverness as a teacher Merida couldn't tell.

'Ha, if she keeps up at that pace you'll have some competition in a few years,' Fred joked wryly.

'I think the news is making her try too hard,' Jack admitted as he took a swig from his bottle, 'too many attacks and disappearances. How many students do you know that have lost some family member this year?'

'Too many,' Merida said sadly, 'Melody Ash lost her dad two months ago during the Easter holiday, he was an Unspeakable apparently and one day he just didn't return home. What's worse is she was at their house _waitin' _for him.'

'What I find weird is there's been no activity since then,' Fred pondered as he swirled the last dregs of his butterbeer around in his bottle. 'It feels like something's not right.'

'Oy, you lot get off the pitch,' the arrogant voice of Ted Mulcaster rang over the pitch as he and the rest of the Slytherin team, who were all looking unhappily at Jack, walked over, 'Slytherin's got a practice match.'

'Alright Mulcaster there's no need to ell,' Jack said calmly as he got up and gathered his broom while Fred and Merida followed suite, although they glared openly at Mulcaster.

'I'm looking forward to our match next Saturday Weasley,' Mulcaster said loudly to Fred as he passed, 'If you have to scrounge tactics of our scraps the Quidditch Cup's going to be a much easier win than I realised.'

'If you're trying to intimidate me Mulcaster,' Fred said calmly as he turned to the boy clad in green and silver quidditch robes, raising his eye-patch to reveal the spinning eye beneath which made Mulcaster's face pale on sight, 'it's not going to work.'

With that the three stalked off, leaving Mulcaster to regroup himself while the rest of the team who were all trying to hide their smiles. They all laughed about it as they walked up the hill to the castle, while, in the distance, a dark pinpoint raced across the sky as Hiccup and Toothless rode the air currents.

'I didn't realise we had that factor in our favour as well,' Fred said jovially as they stepped into the castle's shadow.

'And what's that?' Merida asked curiously.

'Well, it's not like the rest of the Slytherin's seemed particularly happy with Mulcaster leading them.'

* * *

><p>Hiccup found Rapunzel with Merida and Jack later that night, hanging around on the Grand Staircase while Fred and Flynn had vanished somewhere. He kissed Jack lightly on the lips as he sat down to the mock retches from the girls before talking.<p>

'Rapunzel, I think I've broken the thestrals case,' he said eagerly.

'We're not callin' it that,' Merida said in a deadpan tone of voice mixed with a smile.

'What did you find out?' Rapunzel asked eagerly, sitting up straighter in anticipation.

'Well I asked Gobberâ€|'

'What, I told you not too,' Rapunzel retorted angrily, turning red slightly.

'I know, that's why I only asked general questions,' Hiccup reassured her, holding up his hand in a defensive manner. 'He says that seeing death leaves an incurable scar in the mind that is what allows people to see thestrals.'

'How does that help?' Jack asked curiously as he wrapped his arm around Hiccup's waist and leaned in to hear the conversation better.

'Well, who do you know that can heal something that incurable?' Hiccup asked to the 'OH's' of understanding from Jack and Merida and a frown from Rapunzel.

'No it's not that,' she said straightforwardly without looking any of them in the eye.

'Why not?' Merida asked with surprise, 'I'm surprised we didn't think of it sooner. If anyone's healin' magic could heal that scar thing, it'd be yers.'

'That's the point,' Rapunzel said angrily as she got up from the stairs and turned away from them, 'they _were_ incredible. I lost my powers last summer remember. I'm not the Sun's Child anymore, I'm notâ€|special like you guys anymore.'

There was an awkward silence after her revelation and then Jack's voice rang out, 'Is that what you think?'

Rapunzel turned with surprise to see three wondering faces staring back at her. 'Well, yeah,' she said truthfully, 'I haven't been able to heal anyone with my powers since then so I just assumedâ€|'

'That doesn't matter,' Hiccup said in a resolute manner, 'Even if you can't use that one spell anymore it doesn't mean the whole power's gone.'

'And even if they were ye'll still be special,' Merida added, 'Yer Rapunzel Solaris lass. How could ye ever be ordinary?'

Rapunzel could feel small tears sting the edges of her eyes and brushed them away quickly, feeling foolish now the fears she'd felt for the entire year were being crushed by her friends. 'I'm sorry guys,' she said, 'it seems so stupid now I say it but it felt like a real problem to me. I even hated myself for wishing I was still the Sun's Child because that would have meant we might still fulfil the prophecy.'

'Oh that's a good point,' Jack said before he could stop himself, earning a stamped foot from Hiccup. 'Sorry, what I meant to say was it doesn't matter,' Jack continued hurriedly, 'We've never planned on doing anything about that stupid prophecy anyway.'

'Soâ€¦you think I still am the Sun's Child?' Rapunzel asked, trying to sound as uncaring as possible.

'Yep,' Merida replied simply, 'It's in yer blood Rapunzel, not yer hair.'

Rapunzel laughed a little at that and then breathed a sigh of relief. 'So then,' she said in a more business-like tone, 'If my powers are what stopped me seeing thestrals, then what else do you think I can do?'

* * *

><p>It was the day of the GryffindorSlytherin quidditch match and the tension was palpable as everyone walked to the stadium. The teams had gone on ahead before the crowds to change and get prepare themselves while Hiccup and Rapunzel had gone with them to get to the commentator's box early, leaving Jack to join the large crowds of spectators alone and feeling out of place.

In the Gryffindor changing rooms the team sat around, waiting for Fred's last speech as captain before they went out to play. Merida sat next to Fred's sister Roxanne who had been made the new seeker for the team while Flynn sat with the rest of the chasers and Fred, naturally, stood in front of them with his broom in one hand and his eye-patch coloured red and gold for the occasion.

'Alright everyone,' he announced, pacing before them like a war general about to go into battle, 'this is my last game before I leave. Now don't all of you start blubbing at once, because I've got something important to say first. This is my last match, and I want to win and I know we can. We've got the best team in many years and some of the best players. No one has out manoeuvred our chasers since the first match and _that_ was only by chance. We've got a keeper so good he will literally grab onto a bludger to stop the quaffle getting in, although I'd appreciate it if you tried not to do it this time Daniel. We've got a beater so good she can hit her targets with pin point accuracy from a mile away and, uh, me of course. Finally, we've got a seeker with the eyes of an eagle as well as the brains of one. Ow! Alright, alright. So what I'm trying to say is there's no chance we'll lose because no matter how good the Slytherin's are they not as good as we are as individuals, or as a team!'

The Gryffindors roared their approval and clapped as Fred sat between Flynn and Merida who both patted him on the back.

'Was it too much?' he asked as they began to troop outside to be greeted by an even louder roaring.

'Well it won't inspire armies but I think it got the job across,' Flynn said appreciatively while Merida and Roxanne nodded their approval.

'Welcome ladies and gentlemen to this year's final quidditch game between Gryffindor and Slytherin!' Rapunzel's voice boomed out over the pitch. 'In the Gryffindor team we've got team captain and beater Fred Weasley followed by fellow beater Merida Dunbroch. Next we've got seeker Roxanne Weasley and the chasers Flynn Ryder, Tom Holland and Ashleigh Marsh with keeper Daniel Landry bringing up the rear.'

There was a surge in the cheering of the Gryffindors side of the pitch, as well as some Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs, and Toothiana danced into the air, trailing red and gold smoke behind her which formed into the moving head of a roaring lion behind her as she flew.

'In the Slytherin team there's the three chasers Thomas Flint, John Murkwood, and Douglas McAlister followed by keeper Amber Cattil. Then there's beaters Craig Hunter and Pavel Mulciber and in the lead is Slytherin team captain Ted Mulcaster—seeker.'

Merida hissed quietly as the last words reluctantly left Rapunzel's lips, 'Damn him, he's wanted that spot from Jack since they started together. I wonder how Jack is feelin' about it.'

'He'll feel better when I'm done with Mulcaster,' Roxanne said, a nasty grin brightening her face.

'That's my sister,' Fred said approvingly as he walked forward to meet Mulcaster in the middle. At Madam Hooch's instructions they shook hands, reluctantly in Fred's case, and then turned to go back to their teams.

'Mount your brooms!' Hooch called and, as one, the Gryffindors and Slytherins swung their legs over their hovering broomstick and kicking off at the first sound of Hooch's whistle.

'And it's Flint with the quaffle!' Hiccup's voice took over on the loudspeaker as the chasers began their battle. Merida circled around the speeding Flint and hit a passing bludger coming the other way right at him, forcing him to drop the ball which was caught mid-air by Ashleigh.'

'Nice shot Merida!' Hiccup's voice boomed, 'Gryffindor with the quaffle now, heading for the Slytherin goals. Pass to Ryder, Ryder heading for the goals and—yes! First point of the game to Gryffindor!'

There were screams of approval from the stadium as Flynn and Ashleigh high-fived one another as they came back from the goals. Meanwhile, Merida and Fred were circling Roxanne at a distance, keeping an eye out for any potential bludger attack that might spring at Roxanne while she searched for the snitch. One came, tearing out of nowhere,

and nearly passed their guard until Merida caught a glancing blow on it that sent it reeling into the patch of a Slytherin chaser who fumbled the quaffle he had just been passed.

'Another good shot from Merida Dunbroch. Now it's Gryffindor with Tom Holland flying with the quaffle!'

Jack watched from the stadium beside the roaring crowd and, with a seeker's eye, saw it the same moment Roxanne did, the golden glint of the snitch several feet below her. Immediately she went into a full dive, gaining speed at an incredible rate, and Jack couldn't help but wish it was he, not Mulcaster, who was competing against her. At the thought of Mulcaster the boy suddenly came barrelling in from the side and barged into Roxanne as he descended for the snitch, almost knocking her off her broom and forcing her to dangle from it with only her hands, causing the crowds to boo angrily as he raced after the snitch. A second later he was forced to pull out from his dive as Fred sent a bludger racing angrily towards him and the snitch was lost from view, forcing both seekers to begin circling again.

'And Gryffindor's seeker is back on her broom, and the Slytherin's have the quaffle!' Hiccup's voice called out over the pitch as the chasers zoomed around one another.

'She'd have got that snitch too if it wasn't for that blundering cheat Mulcaster,' Rapunzel's voice called out underneath his like a stage whisper.

'Rapunzel!'

Merida circled the outside of the pitch once and dived swiftly to intercept a bludger that would have hit Ashleigh in the face as she raced towards the Slytherin goal. She zipped between the blocking chasers and looped over the keeper in one fluid movement before tossing the quaffle through the hoop to wild cheers from the stadium.

'Twenty-Zero to Gryffindor!' Hiccup yelled happily, 'The Gryffindor team is not making it easy for the Slytherins this year.'

The match went on for another hour, in that time the Slytherins were able to gain three goals while the Gryffindors added another to their two which tied the teams neck and neck. Everyone was on the edge of their seats, even the quidditch teams although they always were when they rode on brooms. Merida was patrolling the lower levels of the pitch in the hopes of catching a bludger that seemed to be favouring that area and sending it rocketing up towards some poor, unsuspecting Slytherin player when it happened.

'Wait, I think the seekers have seen the snitch!' Rapunzel's voice called out as she stood and pointed to the centre of the quidditch pitch where Roxanne and Mulcaster were now heading skyward, 'GO Roxanne!'

'Rapunzel, no bias,' Hiccup's voice said in the tones of someone saying something they know will be ignored.

'Oh, like anybody is really supporting Slytherin this match,' Rapunzel said derisively as the two figures rose further.

Jack could see it all from where he stood and had in fact noticed the snitch slightly before anyone else had, although he'd been ignoring the chasers in favour of scouring the pitch for that hint of gold. Mulcaster was ahead of Roxanne as his broom had a faster acceleration but that would only work on short distances and Roxanne was eating away at the distance between them. Then it all changed as the snitch reeled around and sank like a stone down Mulcaster's back and passed Roxanne.

'Keep it in view,' Jack muttered as he watched Roxanne try to slow down and turn around, 'keep it in view or you'll lose it.'

He needn't have worried, however, as, while Mulcaster clumsily tried to turn all the way around, Roxanne simply slowedâ€|and then dropped, twisting as she did, going into a free-fall before bringing her broom back to life and adding its speed to what she'd already gained from her fall. The crowd gasped as she plummeted with Mulcaster far behind her trying to catch up, Jack saw her descend on the little golden light and the next second saw it wink out as her hand closed over it.

There was a roar of cheers as everyone stood up and applauded Roxanne who was able to stop her descent just above the ground where she was grabbed by the rest of her team who all pulled her into a hug at the same time, the quidditch cup held in all their hands.

* * *

><p>That night at the Great Hall Roxanne was the centre of attention as Gryffindors, Hufflepuffs, Ravenclaws and even some Slytherins congratulated her on her achievement while Fred held her up on his shoulders and Merida waved a red and gold flag in the air. The others were among the celebrations at their own tables, singing quidditch songs, eating food and making jokes along with everyone else. Jack sat with his old quidditch team who were talking happily with him as Mulcaster had vanished somewhere to sulk off his defeat and Hiccup and Rapunzel were recapping the best parts of the game with friends while Pascal was being fed multi-coloured fruits by ever-entertained first years.<p>

At the teacher's table Professor North and Mansnoozie where having an animated conversation, literally in the case of Sandy's sand projections, that had North laughing loudly with his head flung back. Whittler was reluctantly handing over a small bag of coins to a grinning Toothiana who hovered slightly above her chair, which was really only there for the look of it. Bunnymund and Gobber where attempting to have a drinking competition with Maximus but as none of them had brought any strong alcohol they had resorted to trying butterbeer and seemed disappointed with the results.

It was a fantastic night but, unfortunately, it did not last forever. With a great flash of light something rocketed through an open window behind the teacher's as the sun began to set and formed into a silver-white stag that stood facing Professor North who rose in anticipation.

'_The Minister of Magic is dead,'_ the silvery stag proclaimed in the voice the six recognised as Harry Potter's, '_The Ministry is overtaken. They are coming. They are comingâ€|'_

There was a moment's silence and then the Great Hall erupted into shouts and hysterical screams as the teachers attempted to quiet everyone down and restore order while the six quickly found one another in the middle of the chaos.

'How did this happen,' Jack asked furiously as his grip tightened around his staff.

'We can worry about that later; right now we need to deal with whatever the hell is comin' for us!' Merida yelled over the noise.

'Look outside!' Someone in the crowd yelled, pointing out the window as lights glowed in the distance. Everyone craned around each other to see where the light was coming from and gasped as they saw thick streams of red light roaring into the sky and hitting the inside an invisible circular dome in the sky above, only seen where the spells were making contact with it.

'It's Mulcaster!' Hiccup yelled as he pointed to a figure on the grounds. One stream of red light was emanating from his raised wand while others around him stood in similar positions.

'That's Melody Ash,' Merida yelled in surprise as she pointed to a figure standing about five feet away from Mulcaster, 'What the hell's she doin' there.'

It wasn't just Melody Ash that seemed out of place. From their limited view of the grounds the six could see several other people who were dressed in the Ravenclaw or Hufflepuff colours as well, all of them sending that red light into the sky, attacking Hogwarts' defences.

'We need to stop them!' Rapunzel yelled as that thought entered her head and clearly the heads of the teachers as Mansnoozie and Toothiana were already racing across the ground at the students but it was too late. With a terrible crack the invisible dome above them all shattered into paper like flakes that fell and burned to the ground, leaving Hogwarts exposed.

'What have they done?' Someone in the crowd asked in horror as boiling black clouds of dark sand grew in the distance, echoing with the sounds of hooves and giant wing-beats.

* * *

><p>Dun, Dun, DUUN

Cliff-hangers, cliff-hangers everywhere :P What will happen next? Will Rapunzel's undiscovered powers be revealed? All will be told in the next chapter :D

As ever, thanks for the great reviews.

**I hope you guys enjoyed the chapter and have a good week :)
**

****The Invasion****

'All students go to Astronomy Tower at once!' North's voice bellowed out over the students as they watched the growing black cloud speed towards the grounds. Immediately there were screams of panic as students rushed into each other in their desperation to escape the Great Hall, Jack got a last fleeting glimpse of Mia and Roxanne as they helped herd the crowd in the right direction as the six were buffeted by passing students along with a large group of older years who weren't planning on going anywhere.

'They're coming for you aren't they?' Fred asked Merida as the crowd flowed around and sometimes into them in their hurry.

'Not just us, they'll be after Hogwarts,' Rapunzel corrected, Pascal trying to burrow into her robes as she stared out at the grounds.

'Then we're getting you out of here now,' Flynn said as he and Fred grabbed onto Merida and Rapunzel's shoulders, 'If the defences are down then we can all probably apparate out of here.'

'We're not leavin'' Merida protested angrily as she pulled her shoulder out of Fred's grasp, 'If the Council wants a rematch I say we give it to them!'

'Hell yeah!' Jack agreed, tightening his grip on his staff. Before Fred or Flynn could reply the cloud of black sand reached the school grounds and, having safely passed through the broken barrier, Nightmares and dragons began to pour from it as it opened up. They swept down towards the teachers already lined up before them, Toothiana, Mansnoozie, Bunnymund and Whittler who raised their wands and began to fire spells at the enemies.

The circle of students who had broken the barrier with Mulcaster had disappeared in the chaos but soon they were replaced as figures began to pop into existence around the grounds and join the fight, their faces hidden behind white masks. Several appeared within the Great Hall with a bang and shouted spells at the group of students that had remained, preventing any of the six from arguing further as they blocked then retaliated.

Merida froze her opponent in mid-curse and hit him with a powerful stunning spell that sent him flying into the Hall's stone wall while Jack trapped his in a ball of icy mist that soon condensed and froze around the man. Hiccup and Flynn took on two together, alternating there attacks between whoever was left open and defending from the attacker, eventually Hiccup scoured a hit against one of them by paralysing him with patrificus totalus and Flynn got the other with an expelliamus that knocked them back and into the first, knocking them both out. Rapunzel waved her wand and a brick behind her opponent shattered into a thousand tiny pieces of shrapnel that hurled themselves at the unsuspecting Dream Eater, taking him down immediately, while Fred got another with a golden sleeping spell. Others were quickly dispatched by the other remaining students.

'There'll be more in a second,' Ashleigh Marsh called out, as she looked around for hidden attackers.

'Why haven't the school's other defences worked,' Tom Holland asked irritably, 'The suits of armour should be fighting too shouldn't they.'

'I think Mulcaster's been busy,' Jack growled angrily as an explosion sounded outside, dragon fire glowing brightly for a moment before dying down.

'I need to get Toothless,' Hiccup said worriedly, thinking of what could happen to the dragon without Hiccup to help him fly.

'Good idea. You and Jack apparate down to Gobber's hut and we'll help the teachers,' Rapunzel said to nods from the rest of the students around them.

'We're not even licenced yet,' Hiccup replied worriedly until another bang echoed outside and a roar could be heard, but not the roar of a dragon.

'Mordu,' Merida acknowledged in horror, 'The Council's here too. Hiccup, go get yer dragon.'

'Caution to the wind then?' Jack asked as he grasped Hiccup's hand.

'Agreed,' Hiccup breathed as he and Jack apparated together at the same moment. There was a brief twisting sensation as they travelled together through space and then they reappeared outside Gobber's hut, the fire of the dragons illuminating the castle in front of them.

'Hiccup! What are ye doin' here?' Gobber asked angrily as he charged out from his forge, armed with his detachable axe.

'I need to get Toothless,' Hiccup explained.

'Fine, get Toothless, get the others and get out. The Council's after ye all and the school's lost all its defences!'

'We're not leaving. We want to fight!' Jack retorted stubbornly as Toothless came running towards them, the fires of battle in his eyes as he urged Hiccup to climb onto his back.

'Yeah, you'll need Toothless and I to fight off the dragons,' Hiccup called out as he clicked his foot into place and Toothless roared his approval.

'Don't give me that!' Gobber yelled angrily, waving his axe at the two, 'Right now Professor Moon's preparin' all the students who obeyed the Headmaster for teleportin' out of here. This is not a place for students right now, especially not any of the six of ye. Do as I say and go find the others. Leave the dragons ta me.'

Without a second glance Gobber finished his sentence and charged off, waving his battle axe and yelling a war cry. A chinese fireball dragon flew down to attack him, sending out a ball of flame which was evaporated with a wave of Gobber's gnarled wand. Gobber jabbed out his wand and robes and chains wrapped themselves around the red dragon's long neck, pulling it down close enough to the old warrior for him to knock it out with a single swing from his axe before

charging off again.

'Whoa,' Jack said, impressed.

'No wonder he's dad's best friend,' Hiccup sighed before turning to Jack, 'Get up behind me, Toothless can get us to the others faster.'

'You want us to run away?' Jack asked incredulously, although flying up to rest behind Hiccup anyway.

'No, but if that's what Gobber wants us to do then I think we should listen,' Hiccup replied trustingly, a serious look on his face that made Jack shut up as they rocketed into the air. They rose higher until they were out of the range of the Dream Eaters they passed over a second later, quickly dodging around other dragons in their attempt to return to the castle. They were nearly at its walls until a giant set of jaws snapped down out of the remaining black clouds which parted to reveal the gigantic body of the Red Death dragon Terror, forcing Toothless to veer away suddenly and nearly upending Jack.

'Hello Jack!' A voice called out to them from the head of the creature as it beat its wings once and hurtled after them. Pitch Black stood between the spikes on Terror's head, his wand raised at the black blur that was Toothless.

'Jack don't you dare!' Hiccup yelled but it was too late, Jack had sprung from Hiccup's back and called the winds to fling him towards Black who grinned and sent out a wall of black sand to slam into the boy but Jack was ready and rolled out the way, firing a spike of ice back which was deflected as his bare feet landed on the scaly hide of Terror.

Meanwhile, Hiccup and Toothless were forced into doing all they could to keep out of Terror's attacking range, avoiding the fires he roared out and weaving out of the way as the red death's wing-beats created minor turbulence in the air around them.

'Damn it!' Hiccup yelled in frustration as they nearly flew into the divination tower and slowed to a dangerous speed, enough for Terror to take aim and open his mouth widely, unbalancing Jack above him, to send a wave of flames to engulf them in their moment of hesitation.

He would have managed to hit Toothless too if it hadn't been for the object that zoomed between them, forcing Terror to shut his mouth and twist his head to catch sight of the new threat. It was a sleigh that was being pulled along by fierce looking reindeer and driven by North who held a scimitar in one hand and his wand in the other.

'When time comes get Jack!' He yelled over to Hiccup as his sleigh danced in front of Terror who roared and snapped angrily at it.

On Terror's back Jack was being pushed back by Black's relentless onslaught as he was unused to fighting on a moving platform while Black had learnt every muscle and movement.

'You're not going to get away this time Jack,' Pitch yelled gleefully as he raised his wand, summoning a large scythe of black sand to

sweep down on him. A golden thread wrapped around his wrist as he swung and, before he realised what was happening, Black was pulled from Terror's back and was only saved by a rising Nightmare. He and the Nightmare rose again to face Sandy Mansnoozie who stood on a cloud of golden sand, a whip sprouting from his wand.

'So, you want to die first little man?' Pitch whispered angrily from the back of his Nightmare before raising his wand and firing a blast of black sand which met Mansnoozie's own beam of golden sand half way, linking the two spells in a single stream of black and gold with a centre of spraying sand that weaved between the two as they exerted their wills over it.

Hiccup, seeing this, urged Toothless forward while Terror was distracted by North, who was firing spells at its eyes while staying out of reach, and swooped over the dragon's back until he found Jack standing among the spines.

'Jack!' He called, 'Get up here. We need to get the others out of here!'

Jack looked away from the epic battle between Sandy and Pitch and nodded to Hiccup. 'Okay, for now the teachers can have a go.'

He jumped onto Toothless's back again and they dived down to the entrance of the castle, hoping against hope that the others were still alright.

* * *

><p>When Jack and Hiccup had vanished in search of Toothless, the remaining four had been left to decide what to do with the rest of the students.<p>

'We need to go and get the students in the hospital wing,' Rapunzel realised as they ran out onto the Grand Staircase.

'Then you four go and get them,' Ashleigh Marsh suggested, 'We'll keep the way to the Astronomy Tower defended. Apparate the sick kids over when you find them and we'll take it from there.'

Nodding in acknowledgment the group scattered, Rapunzel, Flynn, Merida and Fred running up the stairs that led to the Hospital Wing and the rest running to the Astronomy Tower while the explosions from outside grew louder.

They were passing through a corridor when a window shattered around them and several Dream Eaters appeared, blocking their way.

'_Stupefy!_' Merida cried, hitting two of them in one go before they could raise their wands.

'_Levicorpus!_' Rapunzel uttered in turn, sending another floating up by his ankles and flinging him across the corridor until he slammed into a stone wall where he collapsed in a heap.

Fred and Flynn fought against the last two, blocking curses and firing their own which were defended against in turn. Fred and Flynn fought together as a unit, being friends for so long they knew each

other well enough to guess their next move and it could be seen in the way they ducked, blocked and countered, sometimes at the same time, sometimes alternately. Finally, Fred managed to hit one with a curse that threw her back out the broken window while Flynn managed to deflect a stunning jinx back to the other who toppled instantly.

'Is it me or is this getting easier?' Flynn asked as they hurried passed a fallen Dream Eater and carried on up the steps to the Hospital Wing. He was corrected a moment later when they burst through the Hospital Wing doors and was hit immediately with a stunning jinx that knocked him down before the others could react.

Waiting for them in the Wing was Mulcaster and a large number of the other students who had helped him and by the look of Mulcaster's raised wand it was him that had jinxed Flynn. The sick students and Madam Pomfrey were all crowded along the farthest point of the Wing, Madam Pomfrey standing between her patients and another figure who did not turn at their arrival.

'Traitors!' Merida snarled as she, Rapunzel and Fred raised their wands in unison, but not fast enough to stop the larger group in front of them from summoning ropes that knotted around the three and immobilized them before they had a chance to strike back.

'I told you the mudblood would want to save her little patients Mother Gothel,' Mulcaster boasted excitedly.

'Yes, well done young Mulcaster,' Gothel said as she turned away from Madam Pomfrey and the rest of the infirmary, 'I must say you have done marvellous work for the Council. The Dunbroch girl came too I see, I suppose I'll have to give the bear a call.'

'Melody,' Merida cried out to the girl who stood unhappily by Mulcaster's side, 'Why are ye doin' this?'

'I'm sorry Merida, they've got my dad,' Melody nearly whispered as she looked between them and Gothel with a pained expression, looking around the three realised that some of the other student Dream Eaters shared the same hopeless expression while others, like Mulcaster, seemed to be relishing every minute.

'Enough of that,' Gothel snapped imperiously to Melody who looked at the ground quickly. Gothel paced along towards the entrapped three and gave a flick of her wand which released a white thread that quickly grew until it became a large door that opened to reveal Mordu who prowled out towards them, paying special attention to Merida.

'**Captured already I see**,' he growled to her while Gothel stepped demurely to the side of him to get a better view of Rapunzel.

'You're not looking to well Gothel,' Rapunzel said, attempting a sneer but failing somewhat as she was unable to see the collapsed Flynn from the angle she was bound at. 'I see that losing immortality has suited you badly,' she continued more confidently, knowing she'd hit a nerve.

'Oh, don't be so prideful Rapunzel,' Gothel returned, barely a flicker of anger across her face, 'You were only one road that lead me to immortality, now I've found a replacement that is far less likely to misbehave.'

'**Now we have the formalities out the way**,' Mordu rumbled sarcastically, '**release the Dunbroch girl, I will fight her here and now.**'

'You want to let her fight,' Gothel said incredulously.

'**Yes, there is no other way to achieve my rightful place as True King,**' Mordu snarled back before turning to Mulcaster and ordering, '**Release the girl **now**.**'

Mulcaster hurriedly began the spell to release the ropes around Merida but stopped worriedly at the sound of a high pitched scream.

'Isn't thatâ€¦|' he began worriedly but was stopped from completing his sentence by the loud explosion as a wall blew apart and forced the Dream Eater students to scatter from the debris. Toothless zoomed into the hole he had created and Jack lightly flew from his back and landed between Mulcaster and Madam Pomfrey.

'Sorry about the mess Miss Pomfrey,' he said smoothly as he looked over his shoulder before turning his attention back to Mulcaster, his staff at the ready, while Hiccup and Toothless advanced from the side.

'Why is it these brats always manage to pop out of the woodwork,' Gothel sneered angrily as she raised her wand to send out a torturing curse.

At that moment there was a swish in the air and Mordu was knocked to the ground as something small zipped past and smack into his large head before curving back around to be caught in the furred hand of Bunnymund who stood at the edge of one the hole Toothless had left.

'Haven't we been here before mate?' He asked nonchalantly as Mordu roared in anger at him before charging and closing the distance.

Gothel meanwhile was hit in the shoulder by a passing spell from behind and turned to see Professor Maximus galloping up the stairs. Screeching in rage she raised her wand and fired a hail of silvery daggers at the man which he dodged and blocked before shooting a ray of yellow light back that splintered the wall behind her as she dodged.

'Incendio!' Hiccup yelled, pointing his wand at the ropes that tied the three which burned away quickly and left them free. While Merida, Fred, Hiccup and Toothless stood off against the loyal Dream Eater students who had stayed at the arrival of the teachers, Rapunzel ran back and touched the tip of her wand to Flynn's chest.

'Rennervate,' she intoned quickly and immediately Flynn's eyelids fluttered open and a second later he was sitting up with a

groan.

'Hello beautiful,' he said dazedly.

'No time for that now,' Rapunzel smiled as she motioned behind her at the multiple battles happening in the tight space of the Hospital Wing, 'We've got to get the sick kids out of here!'

She helped Flynn up and they ran around the fighters as they duelled, oblivious of their passing except for Gothel who would have chased after them if Maximus had not kept her hemmed in with a barrage of stunning spells and jinxes. They jumped over toppled hospital beds that had been knocked aside by Bunnymund and Mordu who were resorting to physical combat, Bunnymund even now ducking under one of Mordu's swings and hitting the bear under the chin with heavy rabbit punches. Next there was Jack and Mulcaster who were fighting so viciously that the air around them was shimmering either with heat or, more likely, ice cold temperatures.

'Madam Pomfrey we need to apparate these kids to the Astronomy Tower,' Rapunzel informed her as they arrived in front of the fierce old woman.

'There will be no need, for that' she replied primly as she pulled something from out of her apron, 'Professor North gave me one of his globes to use in emergencies, it's set for St Mungos. I couldn't use it when that old crone Gothel intruded but if you keep our backs safe I'll get them through safely now.'

Nodding Rapunzel and Flynn turned to face anyone trying to reach the sick before they escaped. Currently all the fighters seemed too preoccupied with one another to focus on them but, due to the number of duels, they had enough problems blocking the stray spells from other battles hitting one of the evacuees as they filed one by one into the portal at the urgings of Madam Pomfrey. Finally they were all through and Madam Pomfrey gave them all a final nod before vanishing into the portal and letting it close behind her. With that Rapunzel and Flynn joined Jack in his battle against Mulcaster, firing additional spells at the boy while Jack changed tactics and fired ice spells at the ground to slip his feet. Mulcaster was quickly overwhelmed and vanished with a pop at the moment they paused between attacks, apparating out onto the grounds and followed quickly by the other Dream Eater students who had found duelling a combination of Merida, Fred, Hiccup and a dragon to be way above their pay grade, at least if they got paid.

That left the furious battle between Mordu and Bunnymund, and Gothel and Maximus. Bunnymund was delivering serious blows to Mordu using powerful kicks from his large legs and devastating blows from his boomerangs but, although he was quicker, Mordu had landed some very heavy blows and he had begun to limp while the bear seemed to be fairing much better.

Maximus and Gothel's fight had become so vicious that the stones beneath their feet had become cracked and blurred with the power of their spells that danced between each of them as quickly as flashes of lightning.

'What's the matter Maximus, you seem to be slowing down,' Gothel goaded as she sent a wire like mesh of light at Maximus who waved his

wand, turning the wire into mist.

'The years have hardly been kind to you either you old hag,' Maximus laughed as he sent back a flaming orb that flared out over Gothel's shield, singeing her hair and robes. 'Ha!' Maximus laughed in momentary triumph, leaving himself open for a split second as he moved from one for to another.

It was only a second but it was all Gothel needed, lunging forward she cried '_Radicis!_' and a streak of dark light hit Maximus square in the chest, causing him to double over as his skin became grey and cracked like old parchment.

'Maximus!' Bunnymund cried before leaping out of Mordu's range and tossing several egg bombs into the air which exploded in multi-coloured clouds. 'Hiccup, take Maximus to North now!' He cried over to the boy who urged Toothless on immediately who grabbed Maximus in his talons.

'The rest of you ankle-biters get out of here too,' Bunnymund called as the smoke began to clear and Gothel and Mordu tried to close in on his voice.

'There's not enough room on Toothless for more than two,' Hiccup called as they all neared the edge of the hole that had been blown in the wall.

'No problem,' Jack said as he twirled his staff experimentally, 'Rapunzel, you can help me stabilize right?'

'It's worth a shot,' Rapunzel said uncertainly, 'Merida and Fred get behind Hiccup. Flynn, you come with us.'

'Right,' Merida obeyed as she and Fred jumped onto the back of Toothless who, after making sure they were secure, flapped his wings and dived from the building, rising after gaining momentum from the wind under his wings.

'So how are we getting doooown!' Flynn said, his last words becoming a scream as Jack's icy winds caught him and lifted him up into the air and over the grounds while Rapunzel cast levitating spells beside him to balance them more easily, too ease the job for Jack.

They all flew together, dodging around and knocking back dragons that attacked, and quickly saw North above them still fighting Terror who was roaring belligerently as he fired massive torrents of fire at the nimble sleigh. Near their aerial battle clouds of black and gold sand marked where Sandy and Pitch were continuing their fight, occasional flashes indicating where the two were in the hidden depths.

'You guys stay back while we get to the sleigh,' Hiccup called to Jack who looked indignant.

'I'm not leaving you to go in there alone,' he called back stubbornly.

'Toothless and I are more agile in the air, even with passengers. We don't have time to argue.'

'Fine but don't get hit,' Jack replied, yelling the last few bits as

Toothless sped away to the red blur that was the sled.

'Hiccup, why are you back again?' North bellowed over to them as they drew level with the sleigh. In answer Toothless dropped Maximus' pale, groaning body onto the floor of the sleigh.

'Right!' North said to himself, before pulling out two globes and throwing one in front of him, calling out 'St Mungos.' A small portal opened and Maximus' body was quickly sucked in before it closed again.

'Take this,' North called to them, tossing the second globe to Fred who caught it deftly from the air, 'Now get out from here, there's nothing more we can do but retreat!'

They banked away from one another as Terror swiped at the two of them with one of his massive claws before turning to follow the annoying figure of North and his sleigh as they flew around him in tight circles.

Toothless swung back in the air to where Jack, Rapunzel and Flynn floated and the three gave them the news.

'Alright,' Jack said at the end of the explanation, 'I hate to say this, but it looks like we're retreating.'

'Let's go then,' Fred said, tossing the globe into the air and yelling, 'Dunbroch castle!'

As the portal opened before them Hiccup and Toothless let Jack's group go first as they were the slower ones in the air and Hiccup was damned if he would let Jack get hurt just as they were escaping.

Just before they vanished through the portal, however, the six saw movement behind the sand clouds that covered Pitch and Sandy. The clouds parted to reveal the two figures slashing and cutting at one another with their opposing sand constructs, Sandy sending out long whipping tendrils that cut through the hordes of Nightmares charging him while blocking Black's own spells simultaneously. Black himself sported several cuts and gashes that suggested he'd not been so capable at blocking Sandy's spells.

Then, the split second before they descended beyond the portal's boundaries, they saw Sandy's defences falter as a wave of Nightmares hit at once and sent him reeling on his small cloud of golden sand. It was a falter big enough to let a black sand arrow pass through under his whips and strike Sandy directly in the heart.

'Goodnight Sandman!' Pitch laughed as Sandy stood for a moment on his golden sand before it separated beneath his feet and his body fell to the earth.

'Noooo!' Jack cried in horror and then the scene was cut off and the six all tumbled into Dunbroch castle, the sounds of battle behind them cut off as the portal closed.

* * *

><p>The six sat around the ancient wooden table in the Dining Hall of

Dunbroch castle, unable to sleep as the night rolled gently over them. They were sitting close together, not speaking for fear of breaking the heavy silence that had settled over them after the first few minutes of panic after their escape. It was after midnight when Elinor and Fergus finally entered the Hall, bringing Professor Whittler with them who seemed drained and frail as she sat at the end of the table between the two.<p>

'I know ye all want ta know what's happened,' she said wearily, 'and ye've a right ta know too so I won't make ye wait any longer.'

There was a pause as she gathered her thoughts while the six watched her silently, unable to bring themselves to encourage her to speak faster.

'Maximus and Bunnymund are alive, ye'll be pleased ta hear,' Whittler began with a faint smile that vanished quickly, 'Maximus is not healthy though. The curse has crippled him permanently, he'll be able to walk with barely a limp, but anythin' more and his body'll fail him. He can't fight anymore.'

'And Mansnoozie?' Jack asked grimly, talking for the first time since his final cry before breaking through the portal. At the sound of his voice Hiccup squeezed his hand tightly under the table and was relieved to feel Jack squeeze back.

'Gone,' Whittler said mournfully, 'North managed ta collect the body before he escaped. He, Bunnymund and Toothiana are havin' the burial right now. It's only fittin'; after all the four of them were the ones chosen ta found the Guardians by Manny Moon.'

'If Professor Moon's such a great wizard why didn't he help us today,' Merida asked angrily, her fists clenching.

Whittler looked honestly surprised at this statement before replying, 'Manny Moon isn't a wizard at all young lass, he's a squib. He has no skill at all except for Astronomy, and seein' the worthiness in people I suppose. Even then he stayed until the end, getting' all those students ta safety.'

There was a collective pause as the six thought this new information over before Rapunzel spoke up. 'Professor, what has happened? Why did the Dark Council attack us and what's happened to Hogwarts?'

'The Council have made their move, sooner than we expected that's for sure,' Whittler answered gravely. 'They used their mind controllin' Nightmares ta take over the Minister for Magic's Auror guard and when the time was rightâ€|they stopped guardin'. Luckily Harry Potter and a few other Aurors managed ta get away and give us some warnin' of what was goin' on. The Council's got hold of the Ministry now though, with barely a rumble too.'

'As for Hogwarts, well, Pitch would want ta keep the bright young minds of the next generation under his control and, of course, many of the Guardians worked there. From what we've gathered after the attack, the Council were usin' students, either loyal to them or blackmailed with missin' family, ta weaken the shields around Hogwarts and make sure none of our defences worked on the day of attack. It's worked too; Hogwarts is under the Council's control

now.'

There was a general cry of outrage as the six stood at once from the table and began shouting over one another to be heard but went silent again as Whittler held up her hands for quiet and sat back down when she motioned them too.

'I know ye want ta go somethin' about it and in time we'll make a plan but for now ye must stay here. The land will protect ye against the Council if they find out yer here and we need ta keep ye safe. So I think it's time ye all went ta bed and got some shut-eye,' Whittler concluded as she fished around in her robes and brought out six small vials of purple liquid, 'Drink one each and ye'll have a good few hours of dreamless sleep.'

'How can we just go to sleep after all this?' Hiccup asked incredulously, even as he took the vial.

'Because bein' tired in the mornin' makes us all useless. Ye'll all feel much better with some rest, I know I will.'

And with that Whittler, Elinor and Fergus left the six in the Hall to say their goodnights while Whittler was guided to a guest bedroom to spend the rest of the evening.

'I guess she's right,' Fred said despondently as he looked into the depths of his vial before taking a swig from it, followed by the rest. Slowly, they all made their way up to their shared rooms, becoming drowsier by the minute as the potion took hold, before finally collapsing in their pairs together on the beds, asleep before they hit the mattresses.

* * *

><p>The summer passed in a blur of isolation in Dunbroch castle, only getting news from what remained of the Guardians. Bunnymund, North and Moon had gone into hiding, leading guerrilla attacks and gaining intelligence against the Council but without much success. Maximus had been moved to Dunbroch Castle where he spent much of his time pushing himself to recover and get out of bed.<p>

They all had a memorial service to Sandy one evening where they lit candles around a flat, golden stone, in the centre of which was a black silhouette of the short man, his arms outstretched and glittering sand pouring from each palm. Almost all of the people there cried that day, unable to comprehend a world without the funny, mute little man, but all sat quietly as the stone was fixed into the wall of Dunbroch Castle's entrance hall.

All the while the six were forced to remain in the Dunbroch lands, keeping out of sight in case the Council discovered their location. They wouldn't be able to get across the lands with Merida's power as True Queen keeping the land on the defensive but they would be able to cage the six in and prevent the Guardians from staying in contact with them.

After a few months of this the six were shocked to discover that Hogwarts was to be reopened and students were being forced to attend school as usual, only now under the rule of the Council. Toothiana, Gobber and Whittler remained as teachers, returning to protect the

children who were forced back to school, including Mia and Roxanne who Fred and Jack both fought for to remain hidden in the Dunbroch lands but were eventually told by their sisters that they wanted to return and help keep the other students from being harmed.

They would have to keep a low profile as best they could while protecting the children from the new regime of teachers the Council had introduced to fill the gaps. Bunnymund's lessons were taken by a woman called Scoria Mulciber, twisting Herbology into a study of poisons and deadly plants, while Mulcaster had replaced Maximus, now teaching Dark Arts and punishing any student who defied him. Even worse, Mulcaster's father, Craven, had been appointed the new Minister for Magic and was completely under the Council's control.

One day, as the autumn winds began to pick up, the six had had enough and held a small meeting at the topmost part of the castle, staying out of earshot of any of the Castle's other inhabitants.

'I'm tired of bein' trapped in here,' Merida said as they leaned over the makeshift table in front of them, 'Everyone's out riskin' their lives while we sit here doin' nothin', I hate feelin' so useless!'

'What can we do?' Flynn asked. 'My parents are still working for the Ministry, I can't let myself be seen doing anything against the Council or they'll get hurt or worse.'

Fred patted his friends shoulder absentmindedly before turning to the four, 'The thing is; Flynn and I have been wondering why you four are such a big deal to the Guardians, why do they spend so much time and energy to keep you and us safe?'

The four looked between one another questioningly, wondering how much they should reveal to the two. Biting her lower lip nervously Rapunzel replied, 'There is a reason the Guardians are so protective of us, it's sort of the reason we have all this crazy magic. We can't tell you everything, because we don't want you to worry, but it's enough reason for us to do something to fight the Council.'

Flynn and Rapunzel shared a look between each other as she spoke, as did Fred and Merida. In that look the couples shared a near telepathic conversation, one which seemed to have a lot of shouting and unspecified explanation.

'Okay,' Fred said eventually, the argument between the couples over, 'so what can we do then?'

'Gather allies,' Jack answered.

'We're going to need to get the support of everyone we can get,' Hiccup agreed, 'The more people that side with us, the more there are to defeat the Council.'

'They you'll need to be sneaky,' Fred commented, 'You can't get any unwanted attention.'

'Yeah, you'll probably need to stay in secluded areas and keep hiding charms around your camps,' Flynn added.

'Yer talkin' like yer not comin'' Merida said worriedly.

'You need someone to stay here and keep you up to date on the Guardian's movements,' Flynn explained as he held Rapunzel's hand reassuringly, 'You and I can send each other messages through our patronuses, I've figured out how to do it now.'

'Yeah, we can keep you warned about where the Dream Eaters are most concentrated and stuff like that,' Fred continued, looking into Merida's eyes to show her his determination to help, 'and anyway, you need a small group for what you're doing, Flynn and I would just slow you down.'

After that, the rest of the plan seemed to slot into place. Rapunzel would charm a bag to carry all of their necessities, including a tent and any of the books she thought they might need along the way. Merida would gather enough supplies from the kitchens to tide them over when they camped out while Jack and Hiccup would map out the best places to go. After much argument Hiccup was forced to accept leaving Toothless behind with Fred and Flynn, the dragon being too conspicuous and easily recognised to stay unnoticed. Fred and Flynn would break the news to Elinor and Fergus after the four had gone and would share as much information as they could get from Dunbroch Castle, as well as feed Toothless.

The next night the four was ready to leave, waiting until after midnight for everyone in the Castle to fall asleep before sneaking out with Fred, Flynn and Toothless to say goodbye.

'Get back in one piece okay,' Fred whispered into Merida's tangle of hair as she hugged him tightly.

'As long as ye don't go getting' yerself into any trouble,' she joked back.

Rapunzel and Flynn were sharing a long kiss before separating. 'Pascal's gone back to sleep,' Rapunzel giggled as she looked at the curled ball of scales resting on her shoulder.

'Yeah, it'd be a perfect time to payback all those moments he woke me up by sticking his tongue in my ear,' Flynn laughed as he stepped back, leaving enough space for Hiccup to crouch in front of Toothless.

'You be good for Fred and Flynn okay bud,' he said quietly to the dragon, stroking along the animal's scaly neck so he would purr happily in acknowledgment, 'I'll be back soon enough, you won't even know I'm gone.'

Standing up Hiccup went to re-join the four rubbing his eyes slightly in an attempt to banish the threatening tears, something Merida and Rapunzel seemed to be doing much better at.

'Jack, before you go can we have a word?' Fred asked Jack who nodded and went with them a little way while Toothless watched Hiccup intently and possibly a little sadly.

'We just want to know if this 'reason' you guys talk about is some kind of destiny thing,' Flynn said, 'Are you four supposed to be the only ones who can stop the Council or something?'

'Sort of,' Jack replied, 'but at a cost.'

Fred and Flynn nodded as if that was the answer they were expecting before letting Jack to return to the other, scratching Toothless on the head as he passed. He took Hiccup's hand in his own and squeezed it tightly while he leaned over and kissed the boy on the forehead. Merida and Rapunzel linked hands with them as they parted, waving goodbye with their free hands.

A split second later they had all vanished, leaving Fred, Flynn and Toothless standing together on the cold grass. Toothless made a mournful sound in the back of his throat as they left which encouraged the two boys to pat him on the head as they all continued to stare at the same spot.

'There, there dragon,' Flynn said, 'They'll be fine as long as they're together.'

* * *

><p>It's getting all Half-blood Prince in this chapter
:P

I know the story is a bit of a downer for a Saturday night and I'm sorry for that but I still hope you enjoyed the chapter.

**Now we've really reached the beginning of the end and I'm so looking forward to releasing the next few chapters for you guys.
:D**

Until then, thanks for the reviews and have a good week

25. The Rebellion

The Rebellion

The four appeared at the edge of a wood with a bang, wind and rain immediately lashing into them from between the trees. They were standing on a small outcrop of land that jutted out into a large loch, surrounded by a bowl of closed in hills which left a small river the only exit that poked between two high hills in the far distance.

'Were the hell are we?' Rapunzel spluttered as the wind buffeted her around, waking Pascal who chirruped worriedly.

'Still somewhere in the Scottish Highlands by the looks of it,' Merida said almost to herself as she surveyed the surrounding land.

'There'll be no point calling in until tomorrow morning,' Jack shouted over the howling wind, 'We may as well set up camp and try to get some rest!'

'There's an open patch in the woods a little further inland,' Hiccup told the others as he cupped his hands over his eyes to keep out the worst of the rain, 'I can dry it out in a minute and we can set up the tent.'

'Alright, let's just get out of this storm!' Rapunzel said as she and Merida hurried into the gap Hiccup had pointed to, rushing past dripping trees to arrive at a rounded, treeless patch of ground that, although it was drier than outside, was still soaking wet.

'_Incendio siccatio_', Hiccup intoned as he walked into the centre of the patch, waving his wand in a wide circle around him which left a trail of fiery embers in the air that grew into a sphere around him. The sphere quickly expanded to encompass the others and the rest of the open area, stopping just before it hit trees. Inside the sphere the air was slightly orange and felt as warm as sitting next to a fire, the four could feel their clothes drying as the ground beneath them began to steam lightly. Soon the entire area was dry and Hiccup gave his wand a final twitch before standing aside to let Rapunzel pull the tent from her bag.

'This place should stay dry now until tomorrow morning,' he said, his voice a little prideful, as Rapunzel took out the tent with a final tug. It started out as no bigger than a matchbox but with a flick of Rapunzel's wand it began to unfold itself and soon was the size of an ordinary tent.

'Oh, ye got the good one,' Merida said appreciatively as she opened the entrance flap and slipped inside where her voice became slightly muffled, she had told Rapunzel where to find a collection of small camping tents that Fergus had kept in his hunting days and Rapunzel had taken one of the more luxurious ones.

As the three followed her in they could see why. While on the outside the tent hardly seemed big enough to support all four of them, on the inside it was the size of a small apartment, complete with two bedrooms, a kitchen and a bathroom.

'Bunk beds?' Jack asked disappointedly as he looked into one of the bedrooms while Merida and Rapunzel began to rifle through her small bag.

'Damn right. These are thin walls ye know,' Merida said as she pulled out her toothbrush and pyjamas.

'You two grab what you need for tonight,' Rapunzel laughed as she handed the bag over to the two, 'I'm just going to add some secrecy charms to Hiccup's drying shield to keep us from being spotted by any unwanted people.'

'Cheers Rapunzel,' Jack said as he stuck his entire arm in the bag and began rifling through it, odd clanking and thudding noises sounding from within as he did.

They were redressed by the time Rapunzel returned five minutes later and were currently noisily brushing their teeth in the bathroom while Merida sat in the kitchen area. She held out a pair of neatly folded pyjamas to Rapunzel as she passed who smiled in response before slipping into the girls' bedroom and changing, laying a drowsy Pascal on the far side of the pillow where he curled up and fell asleep.

'Well, we're off to bed,' Jack said as he and Hiccup passed Rapunzel

as she wound her way to the bathroom.

'Yeah, it'll be a busy day tomorrow convincing people to fight in a dangerous and deadly war,' Hiccup agreed as he and Jack stepped into their own room.

'I'm goin' too,' Merida yawned, 'Ye comin' Rapunzel?'

'Give me a minute,' the girl's voice answered from the bathroom.

Within fifteen minutes of setting up camp the four had all fallen into their beds and drifted off into dreamless sleep while the storm raged around their quiet bubble of solitude.

* * *

><p>The next morning the four changed and packed quickly, not stopping for breakfast as Jack was sure the people they were visiting would give them a place at their table. The storm had subsided sometime during the night and the trees and ground dripped with the pearly droplets of rain that remained.<p>

'Ye know, ye never actually told us who we're seein' first,' Merida noticed as they stepped out of the wood into the early morning sunlight.

'There should be a castle around here somewhere,' Jack said, seemingly ignoring her comment while Hiccup looked out into the distance.

'Over there,' He said, pointing to a grey blot on the other side of the loch that was too far for the four to get a clear idea of what it looked like, 'Hold hands again, we'll apparate over.'

A second later and they were gone again, a loud clap following their disappearance as air rushed in to fill the gap their bodies had left. They reappeared in front of large, grey stone walls that rose high into the air, surrounded by impressive battlements and spires that loomed over the four as they stepped into the small overhang in front of the large wooden doors. Above the doors was a green flag with an intricate Celtic knot sown into the fabric which made Merida start when she saw it.

'Oh no Jack. Please tell me we're not here ta see the Dingwalls,' she said almost desperately as Hiccup used a heavy bronze doorknocker to hit the wood three times.

'Yeah they're one of the three tribes that owe allegiance to your family right?' Jack beamed proudly, 'It didn't take us long to find where they were on the map in your family's library.'

'Oh boy,' Merida said as a small slot at eye level opened in the door so someone could peer out at the four, 'Here we go.'

'Who's scurryin' about at this time of the mornin'?' a woman's voice asked as two blue eyes peered out at them from the open slot. It was a plump sort of voice, one you would expect to always be near a cooking apple pie.

'It's Merida Dunbroch,' Merida sighed heavily as she stepped into view of the door, 'I've come ta visit my dad's old friend Lord Dingwall.'

'Oh, so it is!' The voice declared from behind the door, followed by the rasp of bolts being drawn along the door before it opened wide to welcome the four in.

'I'm sorry for all that,' the woman apologised courteously as she closed the door behind them, 'Ye can never tell who's goin' ta be at the doors these days.'

She was a plump woman with an amiable face that was scrunched like an old apple. On further questioning she revealed her name to be Sally Kinghorn, maid to the Dingwalls.

'Is Lord Dingwall up by any chance?' Merida asked hurriedly, embarrassed by the maid's courteous treatment of her and the mocking looks Jack was giving over the maid's shoulders.

'Aye, he's in the Dining Hall, I'll take ye to him shall I Miss Dunbroch?'

'That would be great thanks,' Merida smiled cheerily, following the maid as she guided the four further into the castle.

'_Miss_ Dunbroch,' Jack smirked behind her while Hiccup and Rapunzel studiously tilted their faces away from Merida's view.

'Shut it Frost!' She hissed back, 'I am technically a queen ye know.'

'Sorry your majesty,' Jack said, feigning reverence which made Hiccup snort slightly before cupping his hand over his mouth while Rapunzel's shoulders shook.

Merida had no chance to retaliate as the next moment they were ushered into a large room similar to the Dining Hall in Dunbroch castle, the only big visible difference being the large banner set up on the wall over the fire place with the green and yellow Dingwall flag marked on it. Lord Dingwall himself, an unusual balding man whose body seemed to be growing in different proportions to itself, sat at the top end of a large wooden table laden with meats and other breakfast dishes.

'Well bless my eyes, if it isn't the little Dunbroch!' Dingwall shouted, standing from his seat and waving his arms, 'Sally, go fetch some plates for our guests.'

He bustled the four onto four seats around his own while Sally left to do as Dingwall asked and soon they were helping themselves to the large quantities of food available, Rapunzel even managed to find a sad bowl of fruit tucked away discreetly behind a pile of sausages and fed them to Pascal.

'Why, the last time I saw ye, ye were but a wee nip of a lass,' Dingwall was saying to an embarrassed Merida who forced herself to smile along, 'I took Young Dingwall along remember? I'd always had a hope ye two would get married someday, then again ye never know. I suppose ye must see him around school every now and again at

Hogwarts.'

'Uh, yes,' Merida said awkwardly, ignoring the looks Hiccup and Jack were giving her, 'How _is_ Young Dingwall doing by the way?'

'Oh, I've had ta ship him off back ta Hogwarts,' Dingwall sighed as he looked into his breakfast plate, 'Reluctantly I'll add, I've got no likin' with what that Dark Council are doin' with the place. He's a tough lad though; they won't try anythin' funny with him unless they want a serious Dingwall seein' too that's for sure.'

There was a moment's pause as the four considered the image, some vaguer than others, of skinny Young Dingwall fighting with the Dream Eaters. They struggled to grasp the idea until they remembered that one Quidditch match were a group of Slytherins had knocked him over after the match and it had taken twelve pupils and Professor North to prise his teeth off one of the Slytherin's shins.

'Speakin' of which,' Dingwall continued curiously, 'why aren't _you_ lot at school? Ye've not left have ye?'

'No Lord Dingwall,' Rapunzel spoke up from the table, 'We've just got something more important to do right now and it's why we've come to you.'

'What's so important ye'd break the new Ministry's laws,' Dingwall asked shrewdly, weighing the four up as if he had never seen them before.

'Stopping the Council,' Jack said determinedly from his side of the table, 'We're gathering allies to fight them back and retake the Ministry and Hogwarts.'

'And ye believe ye can do this, the four of ye are barely of age by the look of things,' Dingwall protested.

'Someone has to do it and we've evaded the Council before,' Hiccup said, 'We've heard how you fought beside Merida's dad and the other two clans in the past and we know your aid could help turn the tide against the Council.'

Lord Dingwall sat, pondering for several minutes while the four watched him earnestly. Finally he sat up in his chair and declared, 'Aye, I've had half a mind ta take up my wand already against this bloody Council! Ye've got my help if ever ye'll need it. Err, exactly how will ye tell me if ye do?'

'I'll contact everyone when the time is right,' Rapunzel said.

'And when would that be?'

'We're not sure yet,' Merida said awkwardly as Sally walked back into the Hall.

'Uh, Lord Dingwall, there are some officials here ta see ye,' she said, her voice quavering slightly with nerves, 'they're _Ministry_ officials sir. They say they're makin' checks on all the magical homes.'

The four got up sharply, the possibility of being caught by Dream

Eaters only a day into their expedition was a terrible thought. Dingwall motioned for them to stay still before saying, 'Get behind the fireplace, there's a secret passage that runs down there that'll lead ye out the castle. Ye can apparate when ye get passed the castle walls, now go.'

With that the four scampered quickly towards the fireplace, dowsing the flames and pushing at the stone behind it which rumbled backwards to make way for a large tunnel. They clambered inside quickly and shut the wall behind them, leaving only the tiniest light to see by while a roar from the other side indicated that Dingwall had relit the flame after them. Merida pressed her ear against the rough stone and listened carefully, motioning the others to stay quiet.

'Merida, we can't stay here,' Rapunzel whispered as they crouched behind the redhead.

'Shh, I just want ta make sure he's alright is all,' Merida said, 'We can't just leave him if somethin' bad is goin' ta happen.'

There was no arguing with that so the others fought for space along the stone wall as well and soon all were listening in to the sounds coming from the other side. They could hear the thud of the double doors slamming open and the heavy steps of two people as they stepped into the room.

'And what do I owe a visit from the ministry for?' Dingwall's voice asked, somehow managing to pronounce the lower case 'm'.

'We've come to investigate the rumours that Dingwall castle houses a deadly weapon,' a male voice answered.

'Yes, the Council has decided that in order to ensure national security that all magical weapons in any household should be registered or, if they are clearly too dangerous for ordinary citizens to keep, taken to the Ministry,' a second voice said surprisingly close, as if he was walking right in front of the fireplace.

'Ah, I know what yer after,' Dingwall's voice rang out pleasantly, 'Sally, could ye fetch the old relic-box for these fine men.'

'So you admit to owning dangerous weaponry,' the first voice said with a hint of threat, 'and what does such an isolated magical family need with magical weapons?'

'Oh, it's saved me many a time,' Dingwall answered as a clatter indicated Sally's return with the relic-box, whatever that was. There was the hasty movement of steps that sounded as if they did not want to be in the room right now and a thank you from Dingwall, indicating Sally had handed him the box.

'Do not open the box!' The second voice said in alarm and the four had the faint sensation he'd drawn his wand.

'Oh, ye got no need ta worry. It won't go off unless I want it to,' Dingwall's voice returned soothingly, 'Now, feast yer eyes!'

There was a pause which the four had expected to be filled with the Dream Eater's screams and flashing lights but none came. 'Is that

it?' The second voice asked in what was either dismay or disbelief.

'It's just an old, carved rock!' The first voice said with amusement, 'Are you telling me we were sent here to collect a rock? What damage could a rock possiblyâ€|ARRGH!'

There was the sound of a thud and a loud scream which suggested to the four that something very heavy, say, a rock, had just been thrown quickly downwards onto someone else's foot. The four had to stifle each other's laughter as the second voice advanced towards Dingwall.

'You just attacked a Ministry official!' he cried from the far side of the secret passage wall.

'Nonsense lad, I was only demonstratin' to yer friend the damage the rock could do. He did ask after all. Now I suggest ye put yer little stick away and go explain to yer boss that ye've just wasted Lord Dingwall's time!'

'I think he can handle it from here,' Jack whispered down to Merida.

'I think yer right,' Merida agreed as she stepped away from the wall, 'Alright, let's go.'

As one they hurried down into the darkness of the tunnel, if there had been any torches they'd gone out and the four resorted to using Lumos to light the way ahead of them. The tunnel continued going gently downward for some time, never splitting off or forking in the middle, giving the four a clear path to the exit which, as it turned out, was a round wooden door set into stone.

They paused at the door and Merida opened it slightly to peek through into the light of day and check the coast was clear. They were clearly at the back of the castle as a few feet away the ground fell into the loch, leaving a small tract of grass covered ground in between. Merida doubted the Council would have wasted more than two men on the Dingwalls and the area was devoid of any other person so she motioned the others to follow her out.

'That went well,' Hiccup said as he stretched out in the open, 'You know, up until the Dream Eaters interrupted.'

'We're going to have to be careful when we do this,' Rapunzel stated as she brushed dust and cobwebs from her shirt, 'The Council's going to have agents moving all over the country to keep the people supressed. I think the best times to visit people would be during the early mornings and late nights, when Council agents are least likely to spot us.'

'Good thinking,' Jack said, 'minor question though. What do we do between those two times?'

'I say we apparate somewhere isolated and camp out 'till night,' Merida suggested as she looked over the water as it washed about beneath them, 'Get some sleep, get some practice, listen out for Fred and Flynn and then go recruit some more.'

'Sounds like a plan,' Hiccup agreed as they all linked hands again, 'Anyone know a good place to go?'

'I've got an idea,' Jack said, smiling slightly. The next minute they vanished with a clap, leaving no trace they'd ever been there except for the faint traces of foot prints in the grass which gradually vanished as the wind blew them away.

* * *

><p>It was three months later and the cold January winds whipped about the perimeter shield set up around the four's camp. Inside, the air was blissfully still and warm while the four sat around either inside the tent or out. Jack's choice of hiding place had been a good one, the woods outside his old home being too far away from any major town or city for the Council to bother having patrolled too much, allowing the four to make the area their primary headquarters for the last few months.<p>

Since their first trip to the Dingwalls they had since visited every other group or person the four had thought off, including the other two Scottish clans aligned to the Dunbrochs and other magical communities around the country, or in one case, outside the country.

Merida and Jack were spending the time duelling, not as viciously as they might in order to maintain a low profile but enough to make Hiccup keep one eye on them as he read a stolen copy of _The Daily Prophet_ in case they came to close.

'Berks still holding strong,' he said gratefully to himself. Since the takeover of the Ministry and the Council's spreading rule over the country Hiccup had kept a close eye on his home town, which he hadn't seen now in over two years. Thanks to their allegiance with the dragons the people of Berk had managed to keep the island separate from the Council's control but fought battles against their army of dragons and Dream Eaters on a daily basis.

He flicked over a page to see his own face staring back at him, this had come as a surprise several weeks ago when the four's faces had first appeared in the _Prophet_ but now he just shrugged and moved on. It had been the first time in recorded history that more than one person had been named most wanted which naturally meant the _Prophet_ had come up with a name for their group that seemed to have gone well with the public, The Big Four. Now the fun of being one of the most wanted criminals in the country had worn off it was just something to keep an eye on.

Rapunzel was in the tent speaking with the silvery patronus of Flynn who was giving her the latest report on what was going on that the _Prophet_ didn't report.

'_There've been fewer disappearances,_' the magpie said in Flynn's voice as she held it in her hands, '_Fred and I think the Council's stopping them now they've got most of the powerful people on their side, or under their heel. Now we think they want to keep the people oppressed and scared to the point just before they're pushed into rebelling_.'

'Except we've been tipping them over into it,' Rapunzel said, mainly

to herself as the patronus was only a one way communication, she'd have to send her own phoenix patronus in reply when the report was finished.

'_Lastly we hear there's something going on in Knockturn Alley. I think you might want to check this out, apparently a shop was bought out and has been closed off from the public since the summer and there are rumours that a giant black monster prowls the streets outside it at night, sound familiar? I don't want to put you guys into this situation, there are too many ways you might get seen or caught, but if Mordu's been doing something for that long I think we need to find out what it is and you guys are the only ones who can right now. Whatever you do, don't get caught, I don't care if you don't get the info, just as long as you're okay. Stay safe, I love you.'_

'I love you too,' Rapunzel said sadly as the magpie vanished into silvery threads of smoke. She waved her wand and a silver phoenix sprang out of it immediately to her incantation. It hovered in the air in front of her as she relayed her message back; informing Flynn that they would try to find out what Mordu was planning and they'd send any findings through a patronus message once they were done.

From outside Merida managed to knock Jack flat on his back and began cheering in victory as he exhaustedly waved his hand in surrender. He picked himself up as Rapunzel sent the phoenix flying away and walked over to Hiccup.

'Want me to kiss it better?' Hiccup asked jokingly as Jack leaned down and pressed their lips together.

'Ooo, love on the battlefield,' Merida joked as she jumped over, landing neatly beside Rapunzel. 'So, what's the good news? How's Fred?' She asked the brunette energetically.

'He's fine from what I hear, still doing Revolution Radio on the wireless and apparently the next show will be broadcast in a few days, but I've got something else you'll find interesting,' Rapunzel said to the three who listened intently to Rapunzel's explanation.

'Mordu's working on something,' Jack summarised as he and Hiccup stood together, their arms wrapped around each other's waist.

'Yes, and it must be pretty big if it's taken him several months to do it. He was a master potion maker after all,' Rapunzel answered.

'Then I say we go in and find out what he's doin',' Merida said determinedly, 'I'm not havin' that heap of fur get one over us.'

'Then we need a plan,' Hiccup advised as they entered the tent, 'Rapunzel, do you have any kind of map of Knockturn Alley?'

'It might be in the atlas,' Rapunzel suggested as she dug into her small bag and pulled out a thick book which thumped heavily onto the kitchen table. They flicked it open and skimmed through its pages until they found a basic drawing of the Alley. No one had seemed to

have been able to draw a full map of the Alley's twisting routes but the atlas had made a good try of it and managed to mark the main routes as well as several smaller ones.

'Okay, I suggest we apparate in here,' Hiccup said, pointing to a small bend in one of the branching streets that would nicely hide the four from view until they moved away, 'and then we move up to the roofs near wherever Mordu's workshop is and scout it from above.'

'Good idea,' Merida said, 'I think timin's important here too. We can't do this in the dead of night 'cause I bet that's when most of the dark wizards do their shoppin'. I say we go in just before dawn when there should be the least amount of people around, then we can go around unnoticed.'

'We could do more than just sneak in,' Jack suggested seriously, 'There's no point in just relaying what the Council's doing in there, what could the Guardians do about it when it's in Knockturn Alley? I say, we have a bit of fun too.'

* * *

><p>It was nearly five in the morning when the four appeared in the hidden spot of the Alley streets and the seemed to only have just started to sink into the sky, giving them plenty of time before daylight and renewed activity in the street.<p>

'So far, so good,' Merida said as she looked around the empty Alley, evidently even dark magic had to get its head down every now and then.

Jack twirled his staff and they rose together into the air, keeping to the shadows of the houses and staying out of the moon's light as best they could. They located Mordu's workshop pretty quickly, it was the only building that was fenced off from the street, and landed on top of the shop facing it.

'They've probably got security charms all around it,' Hiccup said as they looked over the front entrance.

'It's a pity for them we've got our own little loophole,' Rapunzel whispered back as she pulled out Pascal from her pocket who was looking extremely nervous. 'I know you're scared of doing this Pascal,' Rapunzel whispered to the chameleon as he chirruped back, 'but we need you for this, there's no one else who can do the job.'

Pascal seemed mollified by this and calmed down, although still with an apprehensive expression on his scaly face. Gently Jack lufted him on the cold winds and flew him over to the second floor window of the building, letting the reptile grab the vertical surface before letting go. There was a moment as Pascal explored the edges of the window around the wall before finally finding a crack and slipping in.

The four waited for several minutes while Pascal moved about inside. Rapunzel had imbued his body temporarily with charms that would help him to disable any sensory spell placed on the building and bringing down any barriers that would get in the four's way. Normally he

wouldn't have been able to do such damage to the Council's guarding spells but he'd had practice already in his egg when he'd provided that small crack in Gothel's spell all those years ago that allowed for Rapunzel's discovery.

Soon enough he reappeared at the window and beckoned the four to fly over with his tail which they did immediately, trying to keep quiet as they floated near the window and prised it open before slipping in, Rapunzel tucking Pascal into her pocket.

As it turned out, the building had no second floor, instead it had been hollowed out by the Council to create one single, large room. Inside there were multiple bubbling cauldrons that were producing foul smelling smoke and bubbling groggily as well as other potions equipment designed for the measuring, cutting or crushing of ingredients. In the centre was the largest cauldron of all which was not sitting on a table like the others but instead on the stone floor, as it was as tall as a table anyway. It seemed to glow with a soft purple light that pulsed gently as the others looked down onto it from their perch in the rafters at the side of the large room.

'We better get to work then,' Jack said as Rapunzel took several packages from her bag and handed them out equally to the others. Slowly they went around the room, each taking a section, and dropped the packages one each into a cauldron while avoiding the fumes emanating from them and trying to avoid knocking anything over in the crowded spaces. Eventually they all ended up at the largest cauldron in the centre of the room and stared into it.

'I'm not really an expert but this looks like the main course,' Merida said as she nudged the empty space beneath the cauldron with her toe where a fire had recently been snuffed out.

'Which is why we'll be putting the rest in here,' Hiccup said certainly, holding up the remaining packages to drop them in. Before he could the four were startled to hear a noise, the turning of a doorknob, outside the door and immediately hid in the only place they could, the most crowded area in the corner of the room. From there they could look around or through the equipment to get a general view of the opening door and the two ominous figures that stepped inside.

'And you're sure it's quite ready?' Gothel's voice asked as she stepped into the building, followed by the bulky form of Mordu, the four hadn't realised how large the door must have been until he stepped through it easily, and a guard of several Dream Eaters.

'**I have run every calculation and experimentation,**' the bear explained as their guards took up station by the door and they headed towards the central cauldron, '**It is perfect in every way.**'

The four watched as the two Council members took position by the large cauldron and Mordu, with what must have been supernatural delicacy for a creature his size and strength, picked up a pair of tongs from a desk by the side, his claws deftly moving along it like fingers. He deftly dipped the tongs into the glowing liquid and seemed to rummage about in it for quite some time before claspings around something and pulling it out, the glow from the water fading even as he did. Turning before the four could see what he held, Mordu

bent over another side table and the air was filled with minute clicking and claspings sounds as he prepared whatever had been in that potion.

Finally he turned with both paws outstretched and a silver thread held between two claws with a black stone set in a gold clasp dangling at the bottom which Gothel grabbed at greedily before putting it on, the stone resting just above the neckline of her robe.

'I suppose I must thank you,' she said courteously, 'For a useless bag of fur you have outdone yourself.'

'**Thank you. I am glad to see you will only now be an old hag on the inside,**' Mordu replied with equally fake civility, '**I didn't design it with any other purpose like turning lead into gold, however. **_**This**_** philosopher's stone is purely dedicated to maintaining immortality.**'

At the mention of the word philosopher's stone Rapunzel had gasped and inadvertently twitched, knocking a glass vial from its place and letting it smash on the ground before she or any of the others could catch it. Immediately Gothel and Mordu turned at the noise, like bloodhounds finding a scent.

'Someone's here,' Gothel said silkily to her guards as she drew her wand, 'Find them now!'

'Damn!' Rapunzel muttered as the four drew their wands.

'We're out of time, on my signal we have to do it,' Jack said, hefting what was left of the packages in his hand. 'Ready? Now!'

Together the four jumped from their hiding places, Merida firing a stunning spell at one of the Dream Eaters while Hiccup and Rapunzel focused theirs at the cauldrons in the far corners of the room and Jack threw the bundle towards the shocked Gothel and hit it with an icy blast. The fireworks in the packages erupted into life as Jack's spell hit it, knocking Gothel back with the force of the blast while the ones the four had hidden in the cauldrons went off one by one as Hiccup and Rapunzel's spells made their way around the room. Mordu roared in anger as his workshop exploded around him and made to charge the four.

'_Reducto!_' Merida cried, aiming her wand at the central cauldron which shattered into thousands of pieces, releasing a torrent of whatever potion had been inside at Mordu's feet which forced the bear to skid to a halt before touching it.

Now that the explosions had begun to settle down the Dream Eater guards were getting over the confusion and starting a counterattack, shooting streams of light at the four who blocked and dodged as best they could while avoiding the spilling potions and broken glass around them. Gothel got to her feet angrily as the spells shot between the four and the Dream Eaters and began to add her own to the mix, sending silver daggers towards the four which pierced and nearly went through their shields and forced them back into a corner.

Meanwhile Mordu had manoeuvred around the spilt potions and began to slowly make his way towards the four, avoiding the debris of his potions, his teeth bared and claws scratching along the stone floor.

'Damn, Damn! We need to get out of here now!' Merida yelled desperately as Jack fell back with a cut along his shoulder and Rapunzel staggered in front of her as a spell burnt her leg. No sooner had she spoken the words than great jets of flame erupted around them and grew in a wide circle, obscuring the Dream Eaters from sight. Merida felt a hand grab the back of her shirt and saw at the edges of her vision another, holding a wand with a glowing tip, grab Jack's arm. Instinctively she reached out and grabbed Rapunzel by the collar while Pascal clung on to the girl's back.

There was a brief moment where the fire settled down and spells soared around them again. In that moment Merida saw Gothel's enraged face and the angry snarl of Mordu as he leaped forward, hoping to close the gap between them before it was too late. In the next moment they vanished as Merida felt a pulling and twisting sensation where she and the four tumbled through space before landing onto a cold patch of grass on their backs with a dark, open sky above them.

Suddenly, a terrifying figure dropped out from the dark, its beard glowing in spots and baring misshapen teeth. 'RAAGGHHâ€|Mornin'' the figure greeted welcomingly as fire erupted above him.

* * *

><p>I've been getting a few questions about whether I'll be writing anything after this story is over. The answer is I will be but it is unlikely I'll come up with anymore big four type stuff; this is sort of my big idea for them.

Instead I'll be writing fanfics about Teen Wolf, Supernatural and maybe some pure Harry Potter stuff as well as possible cross-overs. Hope that sounds alright to you guys :)

Anyway, thanks for the reviews as ever and have a great weekend :D

26. The Big Four

The Big Four

As soon as he had arrived the man was gone again, jumping over the four and charging towards something behind them. There were the sounds of minor explosions all around as they sat up from the grass, the night sky above them painted an eerie orange by the flames.

'Soâ€|what happened?' Jack asked as Rapunzel touched the tip of her wand to her leg and uttered a few simple spells, sending a white sheen over the burn that was down it which began to melt away under newly growing skin.

'I, uh, apparated us all to Berk,' Hiccup explained as he looked around his old home, 'I also think we're under attack.'

As he said that a group of dragons flew over the edge of hill they were on and spotted the four with half-maddened eyes. Roaring they leapt at the four who raised their wands a fraction of a second too late. The dragons, however, were bowled over by another four dragons that ripped and bit at the attackers before making them retreat by flying back the way they had come.

'Well look who the Gronkle dragged in,' a familiar voice said from atop the blue Deadly Nadder, Stormfly. The four looked up into the face of Astrid who sat along her dragon in a nonchalant manner.

'As if we didn't have enough problems, now we have to add Hiccup to the list,' Snotlout joked as he smiled down to the four from the back of his Monstrous Nightmare, Ripfang.

'Is it another raid?' Hiccup asked back as Rapunzel turned to deal with Jack's shoulder which began to knit together quickly.

'Forty Gronkles, ten Monstrous Nightmares, a few Zipplebacks and the twins say they saw a Swedish Shortsnout,' Fishlegs related as fast as he could in the usual voice he used when discussing dragons.

'Not to break up the reunion,' Ruffnut said from her side of her and Tuffnut's Zippleback, 'but shouldn't we be, like, getting back to the fight.'

'No, we should take Hiccup to his dad first stupid,' Tuffnut mocked from his side.

'Actually that'd be great,' Hiccup interrupted before they could get any further into a fight, 'Take us to my dad, we'll do what we can from there.'

'Alright, get on,' Astrid agreed, nodding to the dragons. Each of the four quickly jumped behind one of the four Berkians, the moment they all touched the backs of the dragons their riders urged them forwards and up, leaping into the air.

'Told you he'd want to go to his dad,' Tuffnut continued towards his sister while Rapunzel, sitting in the fork between the Zippleback's two heads Barf and Belch, rolled her eyes.

'Shut up loser. You just wanted an excuse to get out of the fighting,' Ruffnut retaliated.

From the back of Ripfang Jack sat in a sort of half-crouch behind Snotlout, who had the only handhold on the dragon, its horns.

'So, uh, you and Hiccup,' Snotlout said awkwardly as he looked over at Hiccup who had his arms wrapped around Astrid's waist as they flew along on Stormfly.

'Yeah,' Jack said unsurely, not knowing where this was going.

'Are you guys still going strong?'

'Very strongly yes,' Jack said, still unsure what was happening.

'So, you don't think Hiccup would mind if I told him that Astrid and I are sort of, uhâ€¦' Snotlout asked, pausing at the end and leaving the sentence to hang in the air unspoken.

'He already knows,' Jack answered matter-of-factly, not making eye-contact with the other boy in case he burst out laughing, 'Astrid told him.'

'And he was okay with it?' Snotlout asked hopefully, 'Even though he used to have a sort of thing for her.'

'He doesn't seem unhappy about it, but I think that's mainly to do with the fact he has sex with men now,' Jack answered, amazed at his own ability not to laugh when he saw Snotlout's face redden with embarrassment.

Luckily, that was when they arrived at the Great Hall, carved into a one of Berk's cliff faces, where Hiccup's father Stoic stood, surveying the battle. The four dropped from the backs of the dragons onto the ground, allowing the four Berkians to ride off and continue fighting the attackers. Merida was especially relieved to get off Fishlegs' Gronckle, Meatlug, as she had been forced to precariously balance on the dragon's stubby tail because the rest of the dragon had been taken up by Fishlegs.

'Hiccup? What are you doin' here? What is he doin' here?' Stoic asked in surprise at spotting his son, first talking to Hiccup then turning to his second in command.

'I apparated us here dad,' Hiccup explained quickly, pulling his dad's focus back to him.

'Lucky it was you that was doin' it,' Stoic rumbled, 'anyone else and they'd have been bounced back out ta sea.'

'How's the fight goin'?' Merida asked as she looked over the different levels of the village which were all covered in several stages of battle.

'Not well,' Stoic admitted with a warrior's knowledge of fighting, 'with Gobber takin' care of the other kids in Hogwarts we've lost our best smith. The others are doin' what they can but they can't get the weaponry fixed quick enough every day and it's hell fightin' dragon with shoddy blades, especially since we don't want ta kill them.'

'Problem solved,' Hiccup said assuredly, rolling his shoulders in readiness, 'Gobber trained me since I was a kid, I know as much about metal as anyone.'

'I'll watch his back!' Jack shouted back to the others as he and Hiccup ran off in the direction of the forge.

'I suppose we'll just hold the forte then!' Merida shouted sarcastically at their back before they descended onto another ledge of the village.

'Do you have any wounded? I could take a look,' Rapunzel said, turning to Stoic who nodded and pointed a thumb behind him into the Great Hall.

'We've probably got more scattered about the village,' he added, stopping Rapunzel before she headed through the large wooden doors, 'but we can only grab so many in the middle of battle.'

Merida and Rapunzel shared a look and nodded at one another before turning and walking to their duties, Rapunzel into the Hall and Merida into the fires of battle.

'Oy, what are ye doin'?' Stoic's second in command demanded as Merida went out, making her stop and turn nonchalantly.

'Well we can't just let those injured sit out in the cold now can we?' She asked knowingly before running off between two burning wooden houses.

* * *

><p>Hiccup and Jack dodged and darted around rings of fire as the dragons above them flamed into the night air. For Hiccup it was quite a nostalgic experience of the time before Berk had made peace with the dragons, as if nothing had changed in the last seven years of his life.<p>

'Watch out!' Jack cried as he thrust his staff ahead of Hiccup at the Monstrous Nightmare that had flown down at him while he was momentarily distracted by the onrush of memories. A gleaming net spun from ice and mist shot from the tip of Jack's crook and caught the dragon in mid-air, causing it to tumble to the ground in a heap as the net closed around it.

They ran on, passing the Berkians that were fighting on foot or using bucket chains to deal with the fires. Some greeted Hiccup with surprise as they saw him and the white haired boy charge passed while others were too busy with their jobs to notice they were there at all.

'So what were you and Astrid talking about while we were flying?' Jack asked innocently as he used the winds to fly them over a pile of fallen rubble and landing again without breaking his stride.

'She's been catching me up on what's been happening over here, why?' Hiccup panted as they were forced into a full run by a toppling house above them.

'Snotlout was worried you might try to make a move,' Jack joked as the last of the burning wood fell behind them which was lucky considering Hiccup had to slow down so he had the breath to laugh.

'It's funny,' he said when he'd regained his composure; 'I always used to be jealous of Snotlout for being one of the cool kids. Now he thinks I'm competition.'

'Not much of a competition, you'd sweep the floor with him,' Jack joked as he watched Hiccup send a bucketful of smoked eels towards two dragons that had been following them, causing the two to hiss and scatter as they saw what was hurling at them.

They reached the forge and barely had enough time to slow down from

their run before they went through the door. Inside the room was hot from the fires of the forge and filled with the sound of the pumping of bellows and the hitting of steel. A few people were stood around separate anvils and forges, mending weaponry and armour in such a desperate rush they only noticed Hiccup and Jack enter the room when one of them finished refitting a sword and looked up at them.

'If you need your weapons fixed you'll have to rely on your magic for a while, we've not got the manpower,' she said as she wiped her brow and grabbed a dented axe from a rack beside her.

'You do now,' Hiccup said as he removed his jacket to leave only his short-sleeve shirt on and put the jacket on a hook he knew would be there. He headed towards the main forge and anvil in the middle of the room, Gobber's forge and anvil, and began to bark out order to the other blacksmiths who perplexed at first but heard the knowledge in Hiccup's words and got to work immediately.

'Jack, could you support the others out there until we can get them resupplied?' Hiccup asked as he set to work fixing a dragon net.

'Do you even have to ask?' Jack grinned as he backed out of the hot room, not quite able to stop himself looking at Hiccup's bare arms one last time before departing. He swung his staff around himself and shot up into the air on icy winds and circled around to see who needed his help most. Eventually he decided on two large Gronkle riders who were being chased down by a Monstrous Nightmare and two Zipplebacks.

He flew forward and sent a hailstorm horizontally at the attacking dragons, blinding and annoying them enough to distract them from the two Gronkle riders. The four Zippleback heads screamed angrily, spewing green smoke at Jack who diverted it with the winds which meant that when the cloud was ignited it exploded back in the Zipplebacks' many faces. The Monstrous Nightmare came at him next, diving from above and snapping at him with its jaws, he dodged around them by a fraction of an inch and spun around to face the dragon again as it hovered on a thermal from a fire below. The two Zipplebacks then emerged from the smoke of their own explosion below him and all four heads made a grab for him at once, forcing Jack to raise himself higher even though all it achieved was them following him together with the Monstrous Nightmare.

Quickly, the Monstrous Nightmare struck, pushing off from one of the Zipplebacks with its hind legs to accelerate at Jack faster and take him off guard, which it nearly did. Jack, however, managed to make an awkward twirl in the air, rolling off the dragon's snout and spinning down its back, heading for the Zipplebacks as he went. Thinking fast, Jack used the momentum of the twirl to his advantage and went into a full dive, going into a spin as he did, between the heads of the Zipplebacks which followed him down and were caught in the snow lassos that weaved out from Jack's staff as he passed them. With a deft movement with his wrist Jack had the two dragons tied to one another and attached the other end of the joined lassos to a large block of ice that would weigh the dragons down for the rest of the night and most of the next day. Giving a jaunty wave, Jack let the winds catch him and rose into the air once more as the Zipplebacks tried to break their fall as best they could.

He was caught almost instantly by the Monstrous Nightmare that now

had flames running along its body. Jack yelled as the flames touched his skin and burned his blue hoodie while the dragon's talons gripped down hoarder on him, almost making him drop his staff. He clung on to it though, tightening his grip until his knuckles turned white, and the staff began to glow blue and white from its core. Jack could feel the power from it coursing up his arm and touched the palm of his empty hand against the burning chest of the Monstrous Nightmare. The flames around his hand died down instantly and Jack pushed the power further along the dragon's hide, unsure of what he was doing but sure it was going to work. Slowly at first but gaining speed with every second the fires began to die down around the dragon, swept away by an icy blue aura that spread out from Jack's hand. The Monstrous Nightmare didn't realise what was going on until it was too late and its fires were burnt out with a final snap, screeching in rage it tried to close its jaws around Jack's neck but he blocked the dragon's fangs with a wall of ice that sprouted from his hand, causing them to skitter along its smooth surface. With an effort, Jack pushed the snapping mouth away and brought round his staff, wrapping the dragon's long snout in ice chains and hauling on the end of them to make the dragon plummet from the sky as its balance was broken, letting go of Jack who spun away as it fell.

Jack watched the dragon drop the last few feet to the ground and summoned winds beneath it to stop a heavy landing and let it settle gently down onto the grass where the icy chains around its snout dug themselves deeply into the earth. Breathing deeply, Jack hung motionlessly in the air for a moment to let the blood return to his limbs from where the dragon had hold of him.

'You are so lucky that my boyfriend would've killed me if I'd hurt you,' he panted at the dragon below him which didn't seem to hear or was now ignoring him angrily. Sighing, Jack turned in the air and spotted another group that need help who he rushed off to immediately.

* * *

><p>'Mrrgh, who're you?' the half-conscious Berkian asked Merida as she grabbed him and pulled him onto her shoulder.<p>

'The one gettin' ye out of here,' Merida stated triumphantly as she hauled the man along, keeping her wand drawn as the dragons, and Jack now apparently, flew over them in the sky.

'Where's m' dragon?' The man mumbled slightly as he began to take a few shaky steps, easing Merida's work and helping them move a little faster.

'I though ye were one of the ground warriors,' Merida said perplexedly, she hadn't seen any dragon fall from the sky around where she'd found the man.

'I am, he's a teâ€|a terri, a small one,' the man finished lamely as Merida looked about in the grass around them for any sign of a small dragon.

'Can't see a thing,' she said worriedly, she knew leaving a Berkian without their dragon wouldn't end well; she'd seen the look of loss in Hiccup for the last few months. 'What was his name?'

'Dribble,' the man managed in his concussed state, ''Cause when I firs' got him heâ€|'

'I think I get the idea,' Merida interrupted as she raised her wand, '_Accio Dribble_!'

Nothing happened and Merida gritted her teeth, it was unlikely to have worked considering how immune to magic dragon scale was but it was still irritating. Instead she'd need to use an alternative and dug into in of her pockets for a small leather bag. She let the man down onto the ground and took a pinch of dry earth from the pouch and flung it around her in a circle before tucking away the pouch filled with what remained of the Dunbroch soil. She raised the palm of her right hand and slammed it into the ground now covered in the earth of the land she ruled, sending out a faint pulse of blue flame that fanned away from her and spread over the grass until a small, unconscious figure was lit up by the flames some way off. She ran down to it before the power in the earth died away and the fire faded, finding a small Terrible Terror curled in the grass she took him in her palms and ran him back to his owner who tucked him away in a special pocket that was designed for the little dragon.

Nodding with the knowledge of a job well down, Merida half-carried, half-tugged the man back into the Great Hall and had him sit on one of the benches to wait for a healer's care. Turning back to go outside once more she was stopped by Rapunzel who stuck her hand out absentmindedly as she passed.

'Don't bother, there's no one else out there who needs attention,' she said as she ground herbs in a pestle, 'I think the fighting's started to die down.'

'How do you know?' Merida asked in surprise.

'I'm not sure. I just have this feeling that everyone who needs to be healed is here,' Rapunzel replied with a shrug and Pascal held up his hands in a manner that said he had no idea either but they should just go with it.

'So what, we just sit here and twiddle our thumbs?' Merida asked, horrified at the thought that the fight was going to end without her.

'Don't be too disappointed, I think we won't be waiting long.'

Rapunzel was right as in the next minute or so the Great Hall burst in with the rest of the triumphant village and their dragons pouring in through the doors, Hiccup and Jack among them while Stoic lead the charge. As the entire crowd entered the Hall and began to make celebratory toasts to the four who'd hastened their victory and healed their wounded, the morning sun rose over the horizon and burst through the doors with a golden light that shone for a brief moment on Rapunzel's hair, as if caressing it.

* * *

><p>Jack groaned, putting an arm over his eyes as Hiccup sat up on the edge of the bed. It was mid-morning and the boys were only just getting up, as was most of Berk considering the village spent half

the night fighting the latest dragon raids. Jack leaned out from the covers and wrapped his arm around his boyfriend's waist, gently trying to pull him back into bed even as he resisted.<p>

'Why are we getting up? We don't have to get up until twelve,' he complained as Hiccup resisted his pull, attempting to tighten one of the screws along his prosthetic leg.

'Fred's going to be on the air in a minute,' Hiccup reminded him playfully as Jack fell, defeated, back onto his back.

'Is there any chance we're going to see some action?' He asked in the tone of someone who knew not to expect a yes. The morning after the four's arrival at Berk, Rapunzel had sent a patronus report to Fred and Flynn detailing their discovery, escape and current location and a day later they received a reply:

'_We've shared your information with the Guardians and they say you lot should stay put for now. If the situation in Berk changes to anything more than dragon raids you'll have to pull out, but for now the Council don't know where you are and that's the way we should keep it. Until the time is right we all need to wait to strike the finishing blow against the Council. Until then, Love you._'

Since then the four had remained in Berk, helping to rebuild the village by day and fighting the raids by night, as well as providing any information they could take from the scouting missions they made every few weeks. It had been getting harder to stay put though as April turned to May, Jack and Fred both worried about their sisters in Hogwarts where rumours about the Herbology lessons taught by Scoria Mulciber, including being force fed poison plants, began to circulate during the Easter holidays. Merida and Rapunzel were both missing Fred and Flynn, having now spent several months away from them while Hiccup thought he was beginning to suffer from flying withdrawal without Toothless.

'It'll happen eventually,' Hiccup replied optimistically, 'the Guardians just need time to get everything prepared.'

'So until then,' Jack returned slyly as he grabbed Hiccup by the waist and pulled him back onto the bed, kissing the side of his neck playfully, 'we can stay in bed.'

They wrestled playfully on top of the sheets for a few minutes until Jack managed to grab both of Hiccup's wrists and push him, laughing, back onto the bed.

'Okay, okay,' Hiccup said as he laughed, 'I'll stay but just for a few more minutes.'

'Fine with me,' Jack smiled as he bent down and kissed Hiccup who returned it, stroking his hands down Jack's bare chest as Jack slid his shirt over his head. For a while they forgot about Fred's pirate radio show, they forgot about the war and its future, all they needed right now was each other.

* * *

><p>By the time Jack and Hiccup arrived at the Hall where Rapunzel and Merida had taken the radio, Fred's show was wrapping up, allowing

them to hear only the last few reports.<p>

'_As ever the Big Four are continuing to make the Council's life a living hell everywhere you look. Thanks to their most recent excursion they were able to supply the resistance with enough information to make a raid on our most hated Minister for Magic's country home. Unfortunately neither Mulcaster nor his son were there at the time but several dark artefacts were removed nonetheless, as well as multiple copies of future plans our dear Minister has for the country. With this information at our disposal we'll be able to strike an even greater blow against the Council's rule and we'll keep you updated in the coming days. We're about to turn over to Maximus now who will give his usual tribute to those who have passed on at the hands of this war. Our next show will be within the next week and the password will be 'Mad-Eye'. Stay safe and keep an ear out for us.'_

'Oddly short today,' Rapunzel mumbled to herself thoughtfully, turning down the volume of the radio slightly as Maximus's voice came on beginning to list the names of the reported dead and missing since the last show. Once Maximus had regained the strength to walk about Dunbroch Castle he had begun to assist Fred and Flynn in their work which included the unhappy job on the radio, apparently he'd chosen to do it because he knew someone should. The four always kept this on but at a lower volume so as to be background noise, it was difficult to listen to after a while.

'And where have you two been?' Merida asked Jack and Hiccup as she spotted them coming in. By the looks of the quiver slung around her shoulder and the targets lined along the walls, so spiky with arrows they looked like hedgehogs, Merida had been training again. 'Ye missed most of the show.'

'Sorry, we overslept,' Jack grinned while Hiccup made a theatrical yawn to help their case which didn't seem to fool Merida for a minute.

'Was there anything important that we missed?' Hiccup asked, now feeling a little bad for missing on what was so important for Merida who rarely had the chance to hear her boyfriend's voice any other way.

'No, it seemed oddly empty actually,' Merida admitted as Rapunzel joined the group with Pascal on her shoulder.

'There must be something going on,' Rapunzel reasoned, 'some big story that they're saving up for before talking about.'

'We haven't heard about anything like that though,' Hiccup said uncertainly.

'I think we're about to,' Jack said as silver light flashed through the large double doors of the Hall and coalesced into a magpie which hopped onto Rapunzel's waiting hand.

'_It's time_, ' the patronus began abruptly in Flynn's voice as it hovered slightly above Rapunzel's palm, '_The documents we stole from Craven Mulcaster turned out to be endgame plans. It's all stuff like using the Hogwarts students as hostages against the rogue teachers and sending in an army, led by Terror, to obliterate all the

strongholds that still fight against the Council, Berk and the Dunbroch land included. _

'_North and the others are going to make a stand and take Hogwarts back before they have the chance. It looks like it's going to be the big one since I doubt the Council will sit back when they find out. We can't just bring in our army straight away though, the Dream Eaters inside will just use the students against us. Instead North wants us six to rendezvous with him and the teachers outside Hogwarts and drive out the Dream Eaters before they know what's hit them. We're meeting at the Shrieking Shack at six o'clock tonight; see you all then.'_

The Patronus vanished into puffs of silvery mist, leaving the four sitting quietly, unable to speak for a moment. Slowly they began to regain normal breathing patterns as the news wore off and they prepared themselves for what they'd been hoping for.

'Well that was unexpected,' Hiccup stated obviously before turning to Jack, 'Also, I told you so.'

'Ha ha,' Jack said sarcastically as he took Hiccup's hand.

'Finally, I can get a good workout,' Merida said excitedly, standing up hurriedly as adrenaline pumped through her, 'We've spent too long cooped up on this island.'

'I'll get our stuff sorted out,' Rapunzel said in her getting-things-done voice. 'We can leave things like clothing and the tent back here but we might need the books, you never know.'

With that the rest of the day was spent in preparation, each of the four gathering what they thought might be useful in the battle and stuffing it into the supernaturally large pockets of Rapunzel's bag. Fred and Flynn meanwhile were gathering their own supplies and preparing an excited Toothless for apparition along with them. Many people across the country also began to receive messages to be ready for when the time came, telling them exactly where they were going and what the signal to come was. When five to six came around the four gathered together where they had first arrived at Berk and clasped hands, looking one last time over the layered island village they thought together of the abandoned shack and vanished.

They reappeared a second later outside the dilapidated, wooden walls that they'd only seen from afar before. Before them a sleek, black shape uncurled itself and hurled toward Hiccup, knocking him over and proceeding to lick him vigorously as he laughed. Merida and Rapunzel turned and met the gazes of Fred and Flynn, immediately bringing them forward into a kiss several months overdue.

Jack, for his part, let them all get on with reuniting and walked over to the half-hidden sleigh, attached to ferocious looking reindeer and containing Professors North, Bunnymund and Maximus, who sat slightly slumped in his seat. All sat around a map that Jack recognized as Fred's Marauder's Map and were pointing at various points of interest to them until North looked up and noticed Jack.

'Ah, Jack,' He said enthusiastically, 'are you ready for the making of the trouble?'

* * *

><p>It's time for the final battle to begin. Who's excited? Because I know I am, considering what's coming soon.

**I hope you guys enjoyed the chapter and thanks for your reviews as ever :) **

Until next time, have a good weekend

27. The Final Battle

The Final Battle

After the reunions were complete the six and the Guardians sat down around Fred's map of Hogwarts where multiple areas had been highlighted with magical light. As he spoke North pointed to these areas one by one as his plan unfolded.

'You want us to split up?' Fred asked incredulously mere seconds after North had begun to speak, 'We've only just got back together!'

'There are too many areas for one group to hit altogether,' North explained patiently, 'if we want to stop Pitch's forces we must conquer and divide. The first group will be me, Jack and Hiccup, our job is to grab attention of Dream Eaters in Hogsmead. Without them for the backing up, the forces in the castle will be a lot more defenceless.'

'That's where Rapunzel, Flynn and I come in,' Maximus continued as he pointed to another section of the map, a tunnel leading from the Shrieking Shack to the Whomping Willow and from there a marked out path to a secret entrance into the castle itself. 'I'm no longer much use in a fight so, while the distraction is being made in Hogsmead, we'll sneak through the castle and get the students out to safety before the real fighting begins.'

'And that's where you, Merida and I get a go,' Bunnymund told Fred as he pointed to the entrance they were going to use. 'When we meet Maximus' group at this rendezvous point we'll be the ones to give the Dream Eaters in Hogwarts a good kicking before we drive 'em out with the rest. How does that sound?'

'Not bad,' Fred had to admit, nodding his head in approval, 'although if you look at my map you'll see that Rapunzel, Flynn and Maximus will have to make a detour to get to the Slytherin Common Room. Merida, Bunnymund and I on the other hand go right passed it.'

'Good point,' North said as he stroked his beard and stared down at the map, 'very well, you can take care of Slytherins, and why not take care of Gryffindors as well, save time for the other group.'

'I've always wanted to get inside that common room,' Fred whispered eagerly to Merida who suppressed a smirk.

'What're the signals going to be to gather together?' Hiccup

asked.

'Rapunzel can send her patronus message to us and they'll know when Hogsmead is taken care of when we set fire to Dream Eater base,' North said with merriment before adding dreamily, 'We might even have time to roast the marshmallows over it.'

* * *

><p>Ten minutes later the teams had split up and Rapunzel and Flynn were walking out of the tunnel of the Shrieking Shack, touching the knot in the Whomping Willow's bark to keep it docile while they assisted Maximus from out of the hole.<p>

'Along that path there until we get to four trees tied together at the roots,' Maximus muttered to himself as they began to follow the rocky path that led to edge of the Forbidden Forest, the teams having memorised their respective paths before splitting up.

Rapunzel looked out over the landscape and down onto Hogsmead which was just visible between the trees and wondered how long it would be before Hiccup, Jack and Professor North attacked. She half expected to see the first flares of light from spells being cast in the streets but shook the idea away, the team had promised to give Rapunzel's group a fifteen minute head start.

As the team turned a corner and began to descend into the Forest she could see the walls of the castle outlined in front of a horizon that was slowly turning orange with the setting sun. How many Dream Eaters would there be patrolling the castle? For now her mission was to avoid confrontation at all costs but they only had a vague idea of what the corridor patrols were like from the stories told by the students during their holidays, not the most reliable evidence.

'So how were the months living on the wild side?' Flynn asked, cutting through Rapunzel's thoughts and bringing her back to where they were now.

'It was okay. I got to see more of the world at last,' she said truthfully, 'Admittedly we stayed mostly in Britain and Europe but it was a start. Maybe when this is all over we can go and see the rest.'

'That would be nice,' Flynn smiled happily, 'I still remember that morning, sitting on the floor with you when you showed me that atlas marked with all the interesting places you thought were worth seeing. It'd be a nice holiday after this depressing war.'

'You can make your vacation plans later,' Maximus said to them from ahead as he stopped at four trees whose roots had sprouted from the ground and tangled with one another in the centre between them, 'we're here.'

They gathered around the centre and looked in on the apparently impenetrable mass of roots. Following memorized instructions, Maximus took out his wand and tapped a cone of roots at the top of the pile made from the four trees four times. The effect was immediate, the roots seemed to expand and rise, creating a dense ceiling above a narrow hole that led to a tunnel beneath them that headed straight for the castle. Rapunzel and Flynn helped ease Maximus, whose body

had never fully returned to its peak condition, down the hole before jumping in themselves, allowing the roots to close over them and conceal the tunnel as if it were never there.

'_Lumos,_' the three intoned together, creating a large pool of light from the tips of their wands. They walked down the tunnel that was really just an opening in the ground, with nothing but muddy walls crawling with ungodly creatures that sometimes grew so close together that the three had to crouch or crawl their way through, trying not to think about what was moving right beside their face. Soon the tunnel widened a bit more, allowing the trio to walk more freely before reaching a set of stairs made from stone that by now represented everything good about civilization to Rapunzel in comparison to the muddy hell she'd just gone through. At the top of the staircase was the wooden back of a painting or tapestry of some sort and a big enough space for the three to stop for a moment.

'_ScourgifyI,_' Rapunzel muttered, running her wand over Maximus, Flynn and her clothes which were soon eradicated of all mud and filth. Maximus walked over to the painting and pressed his ear against the corner of the room between the wood and the stone wall.

'It sounds empty,' he whispered to the two, 'We go wands out and shoot anything that looks like it wants to kill you.'

Having said this Maximus raised his wand while putting his other hand on the wooden frame, giving one look back to check Rapunzel and Flynn were ready before pushing at the wood and stepping out smartly into the corridor beyond, followed quickly by the other two who raised their wands down opposite sides of the corridor. When none of them saw anything dangerous they relaxed slightly and lowered their wands, although not putting them away entirely.

'We're in the basement level,' Rapunzel reminded them while remembering the many times she'd walked through this corridor to see Grindl and the other house-elves. 'The Kitchens are down that way,' she added helpfully, pointing down the right side of the corridor.

'Which means the Hufflepuff common room is down here,' Maximus surmised as he began down the left side. It wasn't long before they came upon the stacked barrels Hiccup had told them about and followed his instructions on how to open the entrance. Soon he and Rapunzel were through and Maximus was scuffling through the entrance behind them. In front of them stood many surprised, and possibly angry, Hufflepuffs.

'How the hell did you get in here?' A sixth year asked angrily, 'Hufflepuff Common Room hasn't been seen by outsiders for over a hundred years!'

'Shut up Leon, don't you see that's Rapunzel Solaris. One of the Big Four!' A fifth year girl hissed at him as she motioned to Rapunzel.

'How would you know?' The boy asked peevishly.

'Because her bloody picture's in every copy of the bloody news,' the

girl replied with irritation.

'Yeah, mind your manners,' Flynn told the boy angrily.

'Hey! Isn't that Flynn from the radio show?' Another voice asked in the crowds, causing a murmur of voices from people which made Flynn straighten up slightly to seem more impressive.

'There's no need for anyone to panic,' Maximus assured as he finally managed to get himself from out of the tunnel, his added presence helping the students to relax. 'We have indeed come to rescue you. I have in my hand one of Professor North's snow globe portals which I'm sure many of you recognize from last year when we were attacked. It will be the same system this year, seventh years may choose to stay and assist in the upcoming battle but anyone younger must line up in a queue, say their home and step through.'

As soon as the portal was set up the line began to form in front of it and the number of Hufflepuffs in the room began to slowly decrease while the seventh years that had chosen to remain gathered around the three for instructions.

'You must stay in the Common Room until we call you to come out,' Maximus told them with a voice that commanded instant obedience, 'We need to get the rest of the students out of the castle first and that requires stealth which we won't have with a larger group. Rapunzel will call you when the time is right, is that understood? Good. Then we'll leave you to deal with the rest of the evacuation and finish our mission.'

With the Hufflepuff Common Room finished the three scrambled out from their entrance and began the more dangerous part of their mission. Next they would have to get to the Gryffindor and Ravenclaw towers which meant using far more open spaces where they may be spotted, not least the Grand Staircase.

'Professor,' Rapunzel whispered to Maximus as they hurried up the first flight of the Grand Staircase and ducking through into another corridor that would take them up to Ravenclaw tower by another route, choosing to take a longer but safer way, 'I saw a few people in that group who were unhappy to see us. They all went through the portal but by the looks of it they weren't relieved to be out of the castle which makes me think they're not supporting our side of the war.'

'Those assholes,' Flynn muttered as they rounded a corner into a corridor with windows that looked out onto the grounds, now growing much darker as day became night, 'I knew some of them looked shifty.'

'It's to be expected,' Maximus stated, 'I'm sure they're going to try to contact the Dream Eaters as soon as possible. Unfortunately for them, by the time they've organised themselves or sent out a warning, we'll have driven their friends out of here. This is good because it means nearly all the Dream Eaters will be reporting to the Council when they mount a counterattack which means it will be easier to clean up the remaining supporters when we win.'

'Who's that?' A voice asked up ahead, preceding the sound of hurrying footsteps and wand light from around a corner. Maximus, his reflexes

not yet fully worn out, quickly hid in the shadows of a doorway and was quickly followed by Flynn and Rapunzel who crouched behind suites of armour which swivelled helpfully to keep them from view.

A pair of Dream Eaters stepped out from the corner and began to walk menacingly down the one Rapunzel, Flynn and Maximus were hiding in. One was a man of stocky build none of them recognized with black hair and a scar on his forehead. The other they did recognize to be Scoria Mulciber whose picture they'd seen in the Daily Prophet. She was a blonde woman with a thin figure and a face that seemed to have been stretched horribly across her skull, twisting her features into a permanent sneer of disgust and hatred.

'Come out, come out wherever you are,' she called mockingly as she and her companion began to get closer to where Flynn and Rapunzel were hiding. 'We heard you talking you naughty students and that means you've broken curfew and I'm going to have to give you one of my special detentions for that. There's no need to be shy, in fact you should be grateful that I'm the one who caught you. Imagine if Professor Mulcaster had been here instead, at least my poisons don't leave you permanently scarred. On the outside anyway,' she corrected herself with an evil grin.

Rapunzel and Flynn shared a look from their hiding places and nodded understandingly, Rapunzel knew Flynn who Flynn would want to knock out. At the same time the two jumped out from their hiding places, their wands already raised and fired their spells at their targets, Flynn's at Mulciber and Rapunzel's at the other. Scoria had enough time to block Flynn's attack while the other Dream Eater was lifted off his feet so fast that he didn't have time to yell before his head connected sharply against the ceiling. Rapunzel and Flynn then worked together against Scoria who deflected their blows while sending out a few of her own spells which caused the stone behind the two to sizzle and melt on contact.

'Why if it isn't one of the little brats,' Scoria taunted as she backed up slightly, 'Won't the Council be pleased when I hand you over to them. They'll be able to test out all my poison research on you. Thank God I've been testing on those stupid students or else it wouldn't last nearly as loâ€|ZZ..ZZ..ZARGH!'

Her last words were cut off as she stepped further back into the doorway Maximus had been hiding behind. The white haired man moved so fast that his arm was a blur as he brought it around from Mulciber's back and poked the tip of his wand into her neck. There was a flash as sparks of electricity danced at the tip into Mulciber's neck who began to jerk violently before collapsing at Maximus' feet, smoking slightly.

'Sorry about that,' Maximus told the two who were staring at him with their mouths slightly open. 'I think I got a little carried away. We'd better hide him and the body in here,' he said, motioning to the room behind him.

'Is she reallyâ€|?' Rapunzel asked, looking down at the body of Scoria.

'I got carried away,' Maximus repeated as a way of explanation, almost sounding regretful, almost. When he took hold of Mulciber's body as Rapunzel and Flynn began to drag the male Dream Eater forward

they thought they could hear him angrily mutter, '_Stupid students!_', under his breath.

With the Dream Eaters securely locked away the three headed on up the spiral stairs that lead to the Ravenclaw Common Room. It seemed to be the same scenario as the Hufflepuffs, students were rounded up and either sent through the portals or sent to wait for the call. Some, Rapunzel noted, had the same look as the suspected Dream Eater supporters in Hufflepuff. _My own House too, she thought to herself as they disappeared through the portal, how many were there?

With the Ravenclaw Common Room finished the trio moved on to the meeting place at the top of the Grand Staircase. There they found Fred keeping watch in the corner of a corridor, able to see ahead and behind himself in case anyone came near. He nodded to them as they approached and motioned to Merida and Bunnymund who had been hiding in an alcove, ready to jump out at a moment's notice.

'North's group has worked,' Bunnymund relayed to them as he pointed out the window which looked over Hogsmead. The small town was clearly illuminated by the burning of a large building that must have been the Dream Eater headquarters.

'We saw most of the Dream Eaters headin' out there,' Merida added. 'Mulcaster included unfortunately but they've left only a few in the Great Hall. All we need to do now is round 'em up.'

'Sounds simple enough,' Flynn said as they headed as one down the corridor that would take them to the teacher's entrance into the Great Hall.

'Let's hope Jack, Hiccup and the Professor can handle themselves,' Fred stated as they descended down a set of stairs, 'There weren't many Dream Eaters in the castle but still enough to give them trouble.'

'They'll be fine,' Rapunzel said, to reassure herself more than anything, 'I know it.'

A minute later they arrived at an old oak door that had angry and worried voices speaking from the other side. Maximus moved to open the door when everyone had drawn their wands, or in Bunnymund's case boomerangs, when Bunnymund stopped him.

'Sorry Maximus but I ain't letting you go first,' the rabbit said quietly so as not to be heard by the Dream Eaters outside.

'I don't need to be taken care of,' Maximus replied curtly.

'I know but you aren't as fast as you used to be mate,' Bunnymund reasoned in calm tones. 'You won't help anyone if you can't dodge the first spells thrown at you. So let me and the ankle-biters go first, then you can get stuck in when you're less likely to get killed at the first drop of a hat.'

Maximus looked like he was ready to argue but seemed to decide against as he let out a huff of irritation and backed away from the door, allowing Bunnymund to take charge. Bunnymund took out a pair of egg-bombs from a pouch at his side and motioned for the others to stick close to him. He opened the door in a single movement and threw

his eggs into the centre of the room where they exploded in yellow and blue smoke, causing the Dream Eaters inside to cry out in panic.

The next moment Bunnymund was through the door and tossing his boomerangs at the shadowy figures caught in the smoke while the others poured through after him, firing spells at the indistinct figures that still hadn't had a chance to react. Within moments the smoke had cleared to reveal the collapsed bodies of the remaining Dream Eaters some of whom still had their wands tangled in their robe pockets.

'Is it me or is this getting easier?' Fred asked sarcastically as they summoned magical ropes to tie the unconscious men and women up.

'We'll lower the spell that prevents apparition so you can call everyone we need,' Maximus told them as he began to wave his wand around the room. 'We'll reapply the defensive spells when all the Guardians have arrived.'

'I need to get outside to call everyone,' Rapunzel told Fred, Flynn and Merida who all nodded and followed her out into the courtyard just outside the Great Hall.

'Ye're goin' ta need a lot of patronuses to call that many people,' Merida pointed out as they stepped into the dark night air.

'Actually I've worked out another way,' Rapunzel told her as she aimed her wand up in the air and concentrated. '_Lumos solem!_' She cried and a beam of golden sunlight danced up into the night and fanned out into many rays that soared over the horizon and were gone, each ray of light carrying words Rapunzel had put into them, a call for battle.

'What was that?' Flynn asked in amazement as Fred and Merida gapped at the sky.

Rapunzel smiled at him and said, 'Just me going back to my roots. Before they turned brown that is.'

'Bloody hell,' Fred said worriedly as his revolving eye, hidden behind his eye-patch, noticed something, 'what's going on with the forest?'

The other three looked at the dark outline of the trees at the edge of the Forbidden Forest and gasped or swore like Fred. The trees of the forest were shaking and rustling as something charged towards them from within the dark spaces of the trees.

* * *

><p>As the other two groups made their way to the castle, Hiccup, Jack and North waited at the shrieking shack until they had given the others enough of a head start. When the time came they made their way slowly down until they were at the edge of Hogsmead. Hiccup was ridding Toothless once again and lay almost flat along the dragon's back as they approached.<p>

'Okay, we make distraction by setting fire to Dream Eater headquarters,' North ran through with them one more time, 'then, when we have their attention we make way back to Forest and my sleigh and we fly away.'

'That's the plan,' Jack said eagerly as he tightened his grip on his staff.

'Alright then, see you in minute,' North said before running off into the streets and beginning to climb the lower buildings to get onto higher roofs. Jack and Hiccup stayed behind and kept watch for any Dream Eater patrols that might spot him. Jack saw only one who came round the corner of a shop and looked up to see North's heavy boot slip over another roof. He raised his wand to signal a warning but was knocked out as Jack hit him with a blast of icy cold magic that had him standing frozen in action.

A second later North was at the roof of the Headquarters, a new building built into Hogsmead for the Dream Eaters. It was ugly and made from grey brick that seemed to drain the colour out of the rest of the town while its roofing looked like some form of twisted metal and stone. All North was interested in though was the chimney which he quickly dropped down and vanished from view.

'What kind of magic do you think he uses?' Jack whispered to Hiccup as they sat waiting.

'No idea,' Hiccup shrugged while Toothless made a noncommittal grunt, 'he must have invented the spell because I've never heard of one like it.'

'I mean, it must be magical,' Jack said, unwilling to let the subject go, 'The guy's way too big to just slip down a chimney on his own.'

'Is this about the time you tried to fly up my chimney a couple months ago?' Hiccup asked fiendishly.

'No,' Jack denied, blushing slightly. 'I still think it took you too long to get me out of there by the way,' he added with a hint of old annoyance.

'What can I say, I was enjoying the view,' Hiccup joked as he leaned back on Toothless and brushed his hand down Jack's back which made the boy laugh and twist slightly in an attempt to keep Hiccup's mind on the job. A good thing too as North reappeared a moment later, rocketing back up from the chimney in a cloud of soot before descending into it again and popping up from another chimney at a safe distance.

'Looks like we're up,' Jack said, summoning the winds as Hiccup urged Toothless forward. They flew up into the sky, Hiccup and Toothless nearly invisible in the darkening sky. They flew high above the headquarters until Hiccup saw they could get a clear shot and urged Toothless into a dive while Jack grabbed north and carried him with the winds to get to his sleigh. Toothless began to emit his usual screaming noise that he made whenever he was charging up a fire blast and when Hiccup said he shot it down the chimney North had left only a minute before, illuminating the stone shaft for a moment before hitting the explosive, if merrily wrapped, presents North had left at

the bottom of the chimney.

With a bang that threw Hiccup and Toothless back through the air the headquarters exploded, showering neighbouring building with rubble and sending any unfortunate Dream Eater through nearby walls. With a cry of triumph Hiccup and Toothless steered back towards the Forbidden Forest when they were hit by something that had attacked from overhead.

'What was that?' Hiccup asked as he and Toothless managed to stop their in-air roll. His question was answered a moment later as indistinct figures began to gallop in the air around them, whinnying and stamping their hooves.

'Alright Toothless time to get out of here,' Hiccup said as he urged Toothless to move faster through the sky. He saw Jack and North's sleigh rising ahead of them as well as Nightmares that began to close in around them. He and Toothless shot jets of fire at the nearest ones which disintegrated into black sand as they were hit but the respite was short-lived for the three as they came together.

Dream Eaters had obviously seen the Nightmares attacking them from above and Hiccup and Toothless had just given away their positions. Spells began to shoot up from below the while Nightmares lunged and charged from above, forcing the three to roll and weave through the air.

'We must land in tree cover,' North yelled over to Jack and Hiccup but before he could say anything else his sleigh was hit with a spell that sent it into a flat spin.

'Come on buddy!' Hiccup yelled as he and Toothless shot forward in an attempt to grab North out of the falling sleigh which his reindeer were trying to keep airborne as best as they could. It didn't succeed, however, as the spinning sleigh caught Toothless on the side and managed to knock Hiccup out of his saddle, meaning his was only hanging on by his safety harness. A scarlet spell from below suddenly cut in between Hiccup and Toothless, severing the harness and leaving the two separated as Toothless gripped onto North's sleigh which crashed through the trees further away while Hiccup's stomach lurched as he fell.

There was a moment's panic as the wind whipped around Hiccup and then he felt Jack crash into him heavily, hooking his arms around Hiccup's torso and using the winds to lighten their crash as they descended through the leaves and branches to hit the ground below.

No sooner had they picked themselves up than they felt their bodies contort horribly, bending them down into kneeling positions as Dream Eaters filled the forest around them while Nightmares filled the skies above.

'Well didn't you think you were clever,' a lead Dream Eater mocked as his colleagues grabbed Hiccup and Jack's wands from their struggling grasps. 'I guess you didn't think that Lord Black would leave us any of his Nightmares.'

'Go to hell,' Jack spat at the man who snarled. Raising his wand he yelled, '_Crucio._'

Jack contorted on the ground, screaming in pain as the spell took effect while Hiccup struggled to try and reach him in vain. 'Stop, please!' he yelled at the Dream Eater who simply laughed while Jack's convulsions grew worse.

'_Help me!_' Hiccup called out desperately, throwing his head back as if to yell into the sky and reaching deep inside himself for something he hadn't known was there. The Dream Eaters around him laughed mockingly at what they heard as a cry of desperation.

What they didn't hear began to spread like ripples through the Dark Forest, impossible for humans to hear, but other things did. Thick grass began to rustle quickly as the stick-like bowtruckles began to move purposefully through the forest and were joined by the small salamanders that left little sparks in their wake, any old enmity between the two species forgotten to the call. As the ripples spread further they began to gain momentum, growing into waves, and the rustling of the grass began to be drowned out by the thundering of hoof beats as the cry for help grew louder. The air was filled with the flapping of wings which were edged by the sound of a great howling that bounced from one part of the forest to the other. Finally, when all other beings of the forests had heard the call, the waves made it to one final place, the darkest place, where an excited clicking responded as creatures began to emerge from a deep hollow.

The Dream Eaters were oblivious to this and laughed at Hiccup's struggling. 'No one's going to help you little boy,' one of them said mockingly as Jack's cries became more laboured as he fought for breath.

'I wouldn't count on that,' Jack said through gritted teeth as he looked up the wand at the Dream Eater who hesitated uncertainly at the look on the boy's face.

Suddenly, the Dream Eaters at the edge of the circle began to scream and yell, toppling one by one as bowtruckles slashed at their legs. The lead Dream Eater turned around in alarm at the sound, releasing his spell over Jack as he did which allowed the boy to regain his breath, and saw bowtruckles running towards him at a terrifying speed. He shot flames at them in alarm, hoping the creatures would flee to protect their wooden skin.

Instead the flames vanished as salamanders swarmed between the bowtruckles, burning brightly with the energy of the flames they'd absorbed which they spat back at the lead Dream Eater while the bowtruckles ran to Hiccup and Jack and began to tear at the magical ropes with their sharp fingers. Above them, the Nightmares began to gallop down to assist the Dream Eaters but were caught in mid-air as thestrals and hippogriffs erupted from the forest's canopy of leaves and began to bite and claw at the Nightmares.

The surprise had worn off by then and the Dream Eaters began to hit back against their tiny attackers, laughing as they shot powerful stunning and killing spells at the two species that weren't always lucky enough to dodge out the way.

'Is this the worst you could send?' The lead Dream Eater asked Hiccup mockingly as he shot a jet of green light at a salamander. He raised his wand to strike down the bowtruckle that were freeing the two but

stopped midway and collapsed forward, an arrow in his back.

Suddenly there was a whole shower of arrows descending on the Dream Eaters, as if being fired from the trees themselves. The Dream Eaters cried out in fear and alarm and began to rush for the cover of surrounding trees even as more of them fell. The first to reach the border were too busy looking behind them for an enemy attack to fully notice what was waiting in front of them. The first few fell as Gavin and his wolf pack jumped from the trees and ripped into their throats, followed by charging unicorns that gored other Dream Eaters with their horns and centaurs who continued to fire arrows at distant enemies who were now trying to back away from the wolves.

Some Nightmares broke away from the melee above them to descend and attack the combined force of the forest, driving them back and giving the few surviving Dream Eaters a chance to regain their balance. Before they could mount a counterattack against the forest's denizens, however, the creatures from the forest's darkest depths arrived and jumped upon the survivors, sinking venomous fangs into them and moving quickly across the ground on their gigantic eight legs.

The Nightmares reacted at once against these new threats and combined together in a swirling mass which became the long body of a giant snake, a basilisk, in the hopes of terrifying the acromantula away. The giant spiders didn't stop, however, and several jumped onto the black snake and bit deeply into it, making the Nightmare parts of it scream as they felt the poison flow into them and fell to the floor as lifeless sand. The acromantula's greatest fear is the killing gaze of the basilisk but all the Nightmares could do was copy the image. Only humans would be afraid of the shape as well as the power.

Without the protection of the Nightmares the rest of the Dream Eaters were quickly eliminated and Hiccup and Jack quickly freed. Hiccup crawled over to Jack immediately and cupped the boy's face in his hands worriedly but Jack's hands came up to clasp his soothingly.

'It's alright, I feel fine,' he assure Hiccup who pulled him forward into a kiss.

A centaur that Hiccup recognised to be Farris, the boy he'd tried to help during his first trip into the forest, trotted over to Hiccup and held out a hand to help him and Jack up as they separated.

'Why is it you always manage to get into the worst kinds of trouble?' He asked exasperatedly as the rest of the creatures began to mill around the clearing, searching along the dead bodies to check for anyone still alive, arrows drawn to correct this mistake.

'Well you know me Farris; whenever I see a bad guy I just have to fight him. It's a Viking thing,' Hiccup joked as he helped Jack onto his feet, 'Where's your dad, I should probably talk to him?'

'He's dead,' Farris said stiffly, 'He led an attack against the Dream Eaters when they took over your school, and it didn't end well.'

'I'm sorry,' Hiccup apologised as he put a hand on Farris' shoulder which was shrugged off.

'You know us Hiccup,' he said with a sad smile, 'we can't just go letting our pride and home get trodden on. It's a centaur thing. Speaking of which, exactly how did you manage to call us and the rest of these creatures?'

'Hiccup,' a giant acromantula clicked as it came up behind Jack who jumped at the sound and sight of the creature, 'We came to your call and have killed these men to protect you but there are more coming from that human settlement, what will you have us do?'

'We need to get to North and Toothless,' Jack said, keeping a slightly nervous eye on the acromantula. 'With them we can regroup with everyone else and force the Dream Eaters out of Hogwarts. I'm Jack by the way,' the last part was spoken to both the centaur and acromantula in an awkward sort of hello.

'I am Agregor, leader of the acromantula tribe in these forests,' the large spider clicked menacingly to Jack.

'Farris,' the centaur returned, nodding politely towards Jack while never letting his gaze drift from the spider. At this point Gavin, carrying Hiccup's wand in his jaws, and a she-wolf, her jaws holding Jack's staff, trotted over to them, followed by several bowtruckle, salamander, hippogriffs and thestrals.

'Thanks,' the two wizards said as they took their weapons, subtly wiping them clean of wolf saliva as they did. Gavin made a few growling noises, coupled with motions from his head and paws which Hiccup watched closely, as if listening to a report.

'Gavin says his wolves smelled Toothless and Professor North over there,' Hiccup translated to Jack, pointing towards a stretch of forest in front of the castle. 'I say we all move there and then join whatever battle I'm sure is going to be started. Do you guys agree?'

'Sure, sounds like fun,' Jack smiled as he looked over towards the castle.

'We'll stand with you,' Farris answered as he motioned to his centaur troops.

The rest of the animals, including Gavin and Agregor, didn't respond but their general stances suggested they too were in.

'Then let's go,' Hiccup said before, watching as the wolves charged forward to lead the way and track down the dragon and teacher while the other animals began to move around them.

'Soâ€¦giant spiders,' Jack said nonchalantly as they began to run alongside the wolves, centaurs, acromantula and above the bowtruckle and salamanders. 'No wonder you said this forest was dangerous.'

'The acromantula are alright for most of the time,' Hiccup tried to explain as the animals began to take a lead in front of them, 'Well, with me they are. If you didn't know me they probably would've eaten

you on the spot.'

'Good to know,' Jack grinned as two of the spiders came alongside them.

'You are slow,' one clicked at them, 'we will allow you to ride us until we reach the dragon.'

'Don't turn it down Jack,' Hiccup called over as he jumped onto one of the creature's hairy backs, noticing Jack opening his mouth to say no, 'we're probably the only humans who'll get this chance.'

Jack looked at the frightening form of the spider that kept easy pace next to him, shrugged and jumped onto its back before he could stop himself. It wasn't very comfortable, the spider's thick hairs were rough and spiky and the swaying movements its body made as it moved were disorientating, but it was fast. The spiders had barely been moving half as fast as they could when they kept pace with the boys, now their eight legs whirred into blurs and soon they were almost flying over the uneven turf of the forest as they caught up to the rest of the animals.

Very soon they came upon the crashed sleigh, much of its paint had been scratched and several parts of it had been torn off as the sleigh had shot through the trees. Now it rested in a slight gouge in the earth while North, his reindeer and Toothless stood almost back to back, watching the animals of the forest warily as they came out from the cover of the trees.

'Oh, boys I am glad to be seeing you,' North said happily as he spotted Hiccup and Jack dismounting the acromantula while Toothless hurried over to them excitedly. 'Are these all with you?' He asked cautiously, still keeping an eye on the growing horde of magical beasts.

'Yes Professor. I think the Beast Tamer inside me called out to them,' Hiccup explained hurriedly as he stroked Toothless' head before mounting him again.

'The acromantula say that more Dream Eaters are coming from Hogsmead,' Jack added, 'that probably means our distractions worked and we should join the others.'

'Good idea,' North nodded in approval as he urged his reindeer into a trot towards the castle. 'We better get moving then.'

Hiccup and Jack took to the sky and were now able to keep good pace with the animal horde below them, so large that the trees they passed between creaked and swayed slightly to their movements. North and his reindeer remained at the front of the charging mass and soon they were all out of the forest and heading directly towards the castle courtyard where Merida, Flynn, Fred and Rapunzel were all standing horrified with their wands pointed at the mass of creatures heading to them.

'Wait!' Hiccup called down before they could fire a spell, 'they're on our side.'

'Hiccup!' Merida yelled as he and Jack descended next to them. 'What the hell have ye done?'

'Got a few more supporters,' Hiccup smiled as North and the rest of the animals arrived onto the grounds and loud bangs from inside the castle signalled the arrival of the rest of the resistance, several of whom burst out into the square.

'This has somethin' ta do with you doesn't it Hiccup?' Stoic asked his son as he and the rest of the new group eyed the army of monsters.

'We can explain later,' North said to the rest who included the six's parents, Harry Potter and the rest of the Guardians, 'right now we must reform defensive shields before the Dark Council attack.'

Without hesitation the Guardians and parents raised their wands together and pointed them to the sky, shooting out a stream of magic that merged together and began to run around the outside of the castle in a massive dome that managed to contain the castle and all the mythical creatures in the grounds.

As the protective dome met the ground and the defensive spells were finished the six turned to look out over the horizon and saw a dark mass appearing in the distance as hordes of Nightmares began to appear in the sky and Dream Eaters began to apparate at the edge of the school grounds.

In the middle of all of this they could make out the giant wings of Terror flapping slowly in the sky. On his head sat three figures that became clearer as Terror neared the boundaries of the school. The Dark Council had arrived.

'Well,' said Jack as they stared out at the gathering army before them and their own army, 'it looks like it's time for the main course.'

* * *

><p>I am so very sorry for being so late with this chapter. I have had some very busy weeks recently and have barely had time to get on my computer but I hope this was worth the wait
:P

****Everything's coming to a head now and there are only a few chapters left to the end and, if all goes well, this story should in fact be over in the next couple of weeks. :,(****

* * *

><p>P.S be sure to check out my profile where I'll be posting a few details on my next stories after this one, in case you're interested.

28. The Sacrifice

****The Sacrifice****

As the night progressed the Dark Council's army grew steadily with each passing minute. The Council themselves stood overlooking the

school, flanked by Nightmares and loyal Dream Eaters while Terror and his dragon minions stood further back, his heavy bulk casting a darker shadow in the gloom. There was a bang and Ted Mulcaster apparated abruptly in front of them, kneeling to deliver his report.

'All of your forces have arrived masters,' he stuttered worriedly as their gazes drifted over him. 'The remainder of the rogue giants and werewolves have just been brought to the edge of the barrier and are waiting for your instructions.'

'Good,' Pitch said calmly as he stepped forward to lay a hand on Mulcaster's shoulder and pull him gently but firmly up. 'I must admit young Mulcaster you are very brave to deliver these messages to us yourself, considering you were one of the chosen servants we dedicated to keeping Hogwarts out of our enemies' hands.'

'**It's only thanks to your father that you weren't given to the old hag like the rest of the failures**,' Mordu rumbled, baring his teeth slightly at Mulcaster who shivered in fear. Not as much fear as he had of Gothel though, he'd seen how she'd used the philosopher's stone tied to her neck on the other failed Dream Eaters and hoped he'd never have to see it again.

'Oh, let's not be too hard on him,' Gothel said as her fingers stroked the black stone at her neck, 'after all, their incompetence did allow us to corner the biggest of ourâ€¦grievances.'

'Well said as ever Gothel,' Pitch praised without taking his dark eyes from Mulcaster. 'Here are the orders Mulcaster, every Dream Eater is to concentrate their spells against the shield wall until it is broken. When you have delivered this report return to us, I would like to keep you close at hand so you may witness the victory I'm sure you are hoping for.'

Unable to speak Mulcaster simply nodded before disappearing with a crack. Soon afterwards, large cascades of light began to shoot from the surrounding areas onto the shield that protected Hogwarts which flared white with every hit and echoed with bangs as magic met magic. The Council smiled together where they stood, even Terror and Mordu seemed to have smug expressions, and watched as the never ending spells began to slowly weaken the barriers that would finally lead them to the four they'd hunted for so long.

* * *

><p>'Wow,' Jack said as he watched the sky through the Great Hall windows light up with the thousand blasts of magic hitting the barrier above them, 'You've got to hand it to the Dream Eaters, they know how to put on a show.'<p>

'How long do you think it will be?' Hiccup asked him as the six walked through the large crowds of people that had gathered in the Great Hall.

'Long enough for everyone to get sorted I guess,' Jack replied as they jostled past a group of Dingwall soldiers.

They'd seen most of the people they had spent all those months recruiting with a few notable exceptions. Merida had found her father

bickering with the three other clan leaders and the men they had brought along while her mother rushed her into a hug.

'Oh, ye gave me such a fright when the four of ye vanished,' Elinor had told her disapprovingly as she refused to let go.

'I'm okay mum,' Merida argued, struggling to get free of an iron-tight grip. 'Where are the twins?' She asked after prising herself from her mother's grip.

'With Maudie,' Elinor explained, dabbing at her eyes with a handkerchief, 'they'll all be safe back at the castle.'

Hiccup's group of animals, meanwhile, had been joined by two new additions, Sting and Sickie, the mantichore and hydra that Hiccup had befriended during the Tri Team Tournament. They had greeted the young Viking as if they'd never left him and soon were gathered out with the rest of the animals, peacefully acknowledging one another without any conflict.

There were hundreds more that the six walked passed with Toothiana zooming overhead and organising them all into separate units that were assigned to different parts of the castle. The four didn't realise there would be so many when they had begun last year but the numbers had steadily grown as their group found more and more people who'd shown themselves to be willing to recruitment. However, one group remained strangely absent much to the six's surprise.

'I really thought they'd have come to join us,' Rapunzel said sadly to the others as their search proved fruitless.

'Maybe it turned out to be too big for them after all,' Merida shrugged.

'Oh, there you are,' Toothiana interrupted as she stopped above them and descended to a closer ground level.

'Hey professor,' Fred said, his magical eye twitching behind its patch as it zoomed around in its socket in an attempt to keep the entire crowd in his sight.

'I'd prefer to keep you six with the rest of the students in the castle,' Toothiana stated as her wings hummed gently, 'but I know you'll all probably go to wherever the battle's thickest anyway.'

'It'd probably be best if I stayed close to the animals,' Hiccup said in the tone of a student giving a sick note.

'Just as long as you don't get separated from the rest of us that's fine,' Toothiana replied in her usual quick tones as she began to scan the room for the next group to talk to. 'Now I need to go and see about that flying division,' she added to herself as she zipped off through the air.

'Looks like we should get ourselves ready then,' Flynn huffed as the six were once again buffeted by the crowd which had begun to thin as groups left to their assigned places.

* * *

><p>'Mulcaster,' Pitch said to the boy who stood slightly to the side of the Council.<p>

'Yes my lord?' Mulcaster replied with only a hint of a quaver in his voice.

'Give the order to stop the attack.'

'But, my lord, we haven't broken the barrier yet.'

'**Obviously, it would take them weeks to break through the barriers that protect this school. Hogwarts has always taken shielding itself very seriously,**' Mordu snorted as his expressionless muzzle watched Mulcaster.

'Then, then why did you ask us to do it?' Mulcaster asked timidly. It made no sense to him that the Council would spend time on something that would take weeks, only to give up on it before it had made a dent.

'To make an example of our power,' Gothel explained in a motherly voice as she stepped forward alongside Pitch and drew her wand.

'We don't want to make this anymore a waist of life than it has to be,' Pitch added as he toyed with his wand, 'What would be the point of leaving a pile of bodies behind when they could be made loyal followers, given the right incentive.'

With that Gothel made a circular motion that began with her taping the tip of her wand to her dark philosopher's stone that began to glow an eerie purple at its touch. With a swift flick of her wrist Gothel brought her wand around and pointed it directly at Hogwarts where ray of purple light shot forward and met the barrier with a bang. At its touch the barrier's silver flare began to die out while the purple ray spread further over its smooth surface.

This was the power Mulcaster had feared from Gothel. He'd heard rumours that she'd had a philosopher's stone built by Mordu to give her eternal life but the rumours had said more, that Gothel had begun to merge her magic with the stone to take the life energy from anything she wanted. Human life or even magic itself could be drained into her stone and give her even greater power. He'd seen her with the remains of his fellow Dream Eater teachers and what was left of them had looked like nothing more than mummified shells.

When the shield's light faded to a sufficiently weak pallor and Gothel's stone shone so much her entire body was illuminated by the terrifying purple light, Pitch stepped in and waved his wand in a motion similar to swinging a hammer down onto a wooden block. The Nightmares responded at once and rose into the air, merging into a gigantic foaming mass that came down on the barrier like a drill. The barrier screamed in protest as the giant storm of black sand forced itself further and further through until it finally shattered and fell as the storm recoiled and separated into its thousand Nightmare forms once more.

'Now Mulcaster,' Pitch said as calmly as ever while Gothel fawned over her glowing stone, 'why don't you lead the charge, I'm sure you almost see it as your duty to return the order you failed to

maintain.'

'Uh, yes my lord,' Mulcaster said, still slightly dumbfounded by what he had witnessed. He vanished a moment later and was followed by crowds of roaring Dream Eaters, werewolves and giants who charged forward, some apparating ahead while others chose to run. The Nightmares and Terror's dragons remained with Pitch for now; if the plan went half as well as he intended he wouldn't need them.

'**I'll be joining the battle too,**' Mordu announced in a hungry voice.

'Finally going to do something are you?' Gothel sneered cheerily as she looked deeply into her stone.

'**Please, you just opened the door for me to do the real work,**' the bear scoffed back as he began to trot down towards the school.

'Remember Mordu,' Pitch said warningly as he looked over the starting battle, 'don't enjoy yourself _too_ much. You know the plan.'

The bear made no reply but Pitch knew he understood as he began to run in great strides towards the battlefield.

* * *

><p>'Bloody hell,' Fred breathed as he watched the final remains of the school's barrier tumble down through the sky from the courtyard where they stood, 'Since when could they do that?'<p>

The six were in fact the only humans protecting their entrance into the castle. While other entrances had a much larger group of people defending them, their side didn't need it as they were flanked by Hiccup's animal army and a formation of suits of armour from the corridors.

'I'm sure we're going to find out,' Hiccup said as he clicked his prosthetic leg into its stirrup in Toothless's saddle.

Nothing else could be said as explosions and the sound of shattering glass indicated that Dream Eaters had begun to apparate within the castle and begun the battle. The six couldn't turn to help, however, as they saw the main force that was spreading out across the grounds, attacking every entrance. The ground rumbled with the footfalls of several giants, swinging large clubs as they ran, while Dream Eaters and wild looking men and women ran between them.

Spells began to rain down on the group, forcing the six to block and deflect them until Jack and Hiccup soared into the air to start a counterattack from above. The animals took Hiccup and Toothless's departure as the signal to start their own attack, running forward to match the wizard's spells with tooth and claw.

Hiccup and Toothless shot balls of flame down at one side of the Dream Eaters while Jack sent hail and icy winds at the other side, forcing the charging crowd to separate into smaller groups that could be picked off. The suits of armour began to march unstoppably forward to meet the enemy head on, swinging large swords and axes at any Dream Eater that appeared before them. Although some were shot down

by spells or knocked apart by the swings of giants they didn't falter and continued to march on in a single destructive path.

The group of rogue werewolves laughed and howled as they split away from the Dream Eaters and charged to the courtyard where the remaining four stood. It wasn't the full moon but they still had sharpened teeth and claws to rip apart any human that stood in their way. Unfortunately for them they were met by Gavin's wolf pack first who moved seamlessly as a unit, jumping at the werewolves' throats or snapping at their legs to knock them down and leave them defenceless for the rest of the pack.

The rest of the animals moved almost as well together as the wolves, the bowtruckles cutting down Dream Eaters at the leg and leaving them for the fangs of the acromantula and the fires of the salamanders while the thestrals and hippogriffs flew around the heads of the giants, clawing and pecking at their eyes. Sting and Sickie ran and slithered between the groups of Dream Eaters, cutting down any separated from the rest with sting and fang.

The Dream Eaters that managed to get passed them and into the courtyard were met with the combined spells of Merida, Rapunzel, Fred and Flynn. Fred and Flynn caught many of them with golden shots of sleeping magic while Rapunzel used her magic to levitate the Dream Eaters helplessly in the air and throw them at one another.

However, there were too many to prevent going passed and soon some Dream Eaters had reached the doors that would lead to the Great Hall. The first who moved onto the stone steps of the entrance was blown back as blue flames erupted along the doorway. The invading Dream Eaters were thrown into chaos by this as more crowded in; not yet realising their way was blocked. This allowed Merida to take most of them out before they had a chance to regroup and fight back. She had spent a good hour before the battle scattering the remains of the Dunbroch earth she'd kept in her pouch around strategic areas of the school. She blocked, pivoted and struck with more spells as the crowd of Dream Eaters trapped between her and her flames dwindled, finishing the last Dream Eater off with a simple roundhouse punch as she came too close to use her wand.

Meanwhile, Hiccup and Jack had begun targeting a giant at the head of the oncoming waves. It swung wildly with its club at Toothless who twisted almost serenely in the air, letting the club pass under him harmlessly, before circling around and hitting it with a blast of fire to the back of the head. Jack flew beneath it and wrapped icy chains around its legs with a spinning motion from his staff, tightening as the giant tried to walk. The large creature bent down to pull at the chains with its free hand, unaware that it had left itself open for Jack and Hiccup to fly above it and combine two fire and ice blasts to its head, knocking it down to cheers from the boys.

Toothiana suddenly flew past them, flanked by several people on brooms who separated and began to attack the rest of the giants. Together the squadron blinded the giants with spells and knocked them out with the help of Hiccup and Jack.

'We can't stay,' Toothiana called over to them as the squadron reformed around her, 'there are more near the south side of the castle.'

Even though Merida's blue flames had held in the courtyard entrance it seemed clear that they hadn't been as successful in other parts of the castle as the Great Hall and Grand Staircase began to echo with the sounds of battle. Merida, Flynn, Fred and Rapunzel were doing well enough to keep the remaining Dream Eaters at bay though, using giant roots, sleeping spells and jinxes to keep the forces from advancing, although they were beginning to be pushed back.

'They're getting outnumbered!' Hiccup yelled over to Jack as the two tried to ease off the number of Dream Eaters but without much success as they had to dance through the air faster now that the Dream Eaters had begun to fire more spells at them.

'Damn, there's more coming from the lake side,' Jack said as he spun around a red beam of light. Hiccup looked around and realised he was right, many more Dream Eaters were approaching the school from the grounds, passing the Black Lake as they did.

'Having a hard time are you?' A voice called at the four from the growing crowd in front of them. Mulcaster stepped forward as he spoke, firing spells at the four who snarled angrily at his arrival.

'Why is it ye always turn up when yer not wanted?' Merida said through gritted teeth as she simultaneously blocked spells from two Dream Eaters and retaliated with a jinx to one and a paralysing curse to the other before turning back to Mulcaster to block another curse from him. She couldn't hit him though as her time was too taken up with defending against and stunning other opponents while all the curses she sent at Mulcaster were blocked by either himself or a subordinate Dream Eater.

'Too bad for you that reinforcements are coming to deal with your meagre defence,' Mulcaster continued undeterred until a Dream Eater appeared at his side.

'Sir, there's something happening at the Black Lake,' he reported quickly, pointing in the direction of the arriving reinforcements.

Every head turned to the direction of the Lake as a deep rumbling sound began to echo from it. The advancing Dream Eaters, who a moment ago had been shooting spells at Jack and Hiccup, turned to look behind them at the dark waters in confusion at the sound. The next moment the water of the lake foamed and erupted as a large ship reared out from it, spells firing from it as the Durmstrang students spotted the mass of Dream Eaters in front of them.

'Took them long enough,' Rapunzel cheered as she and the rest renewed their battle with greater energy.

The Dream Eaters began to return fire, milling around one another in panic at the arrival of the new enemy. They'd shot no more than a few spells each when several of them were thrown away as earth erupted from underneath them, revealing writhing thorns and branches that rose into the sky, unfurling leaves that were at cloud limit. Screeches began to cry from the tops of the boughs as the harpies flew out from every hidden crevice and fell upon the helpless Dream Eaters, now being attacked on two fronts. The tree itself seemed

alive as its roots whipped and snapped at nearby Dream Eaters, preventing them from hitting any harpy that came near.

Whooping, Hiccup and Jack circled around, leaving the advancing Dream Eaters to the Durmstrang's and harpies, and re-joined the battle in the courtyard. With the tables turned on them the Dream Eaters were pushed back with their numbers being reduced every minute. Mulcaster's face grew steadily more terrified as more Dream Eaters around him were struck down by spells from in front, fire and ice from above, and various animals from everywhere else.

A roar echoed through the night and Merida recognised it immediately. 'Mordu,' she said to herself as the large form of the bear barrelled through wolves and acromantulas alike as they tried to swarm him, using his large claws to throw away anything that got in his way.

The bear spotted Merida and snarled in recognition while Mulcaster disappeared with the attention diverted away from him. The rest of the Dream Eaters backed away hurriedly as Mordu prowled into the courtyard and began to advance slowly towards Merida. A screaming from above signalled a diving Toothless about to shoot flames but the Dream Eaters began to fire spells into the air after him, forcing him and Hiccup to veer off and shoot the flames at the group of Dream Eaters instead.

'**None are to interfere!**' Mordu roared at the Dream Eaters who understood his command and began to attack Fred, Flynn and Rapunzel again, separating them from Merida who readied her wand for when the bear attacked.

Mordu didn't disappoint as he snarled and leapt forward, swinging his heavy paw down onto the stones that Merida had been standing on a moment before. She had rolled sideways and was back up again in a flash, firing several stunning spells in quick succession at the monster's side while he tried to regain his balance. Roaring in defiance Mordu turned and charged Merida who barely had the chance to throw herself to the side before Mordu was on her again, his large jaws snapping down at her as she scrambled to get away.

Deciding enough was enough Merida stopped and raised her wand as the bear's mouth opened one more time and began to descend. '_Reducto!_' Merida cried, firing a blast of magic right into Mordu's gaping mouth, causing the bear to rear back and howl in pain.

Staggering to her feet Merida shot more spells at Mordu, hoping to trip him or blind him with a lucky shot but none were successful. Instead the bear, fury in his black eyes, began to advance at her, accelerating with every step until he reared above her and moved to bring both paws heavily down onto her head.

'GET AWAY FROM MY DAUGHTER!' Elinor cried with rage as she leaped through the blue flames baring the entrance to the castle, which would not hurt her anyway, and flicking her wand to summon a large silver rope that tied itself around Mordu's muzzle and dragged him away from Merida. Elinor shot several more spells at the bear that slapped his head from side to side and made his body shudder with the impacts.

Mordu shook himself angrily at the distraction and roared in fury,

leaping towards his sister in quick bounds. He was only stopped then by Gavin who had leapt onto his back and bit deeply into the back of Mordu's neck, tugging the bear away as his pack began to snap at the bear's heels and an acromantula tried to sink its teeth into Mordu's side.

Mordu roared angrily, swiping the spider away with a single blow and falling on his back to crush Gavin who sprang away to return to his pack who all faced the bear with their hackles raised and teeth bared.

The others, meanwhile, were still fighting the rest of the Dream Eaters when they saw it. Far away on a cliff overlooking the school, huge wings were unfolding and black shapes were beginning to move. At the sight of it the Dream Eaters all disappeared, leaving Mordu alone for a moment before the bear huffed angrily and loped off towards the grounds. Like a flood the Nightmares flowed down towards the school, Pitch and Gothel each riding a steed while Terror and his dragons flew overhead and above the castle, hitting the stones with great blasts of fire that knocked stone from mortar.

Pitch and Gothel instead stepped demurely onto the grounds where several wizards apparated immediately, firing spells at the two as they saw a chance to finish off the Council present itself. The two easily deflected every spell with mere flicks of their wands and then retaliated. Black cut down half by slicing them apart with a scythe of black sand that appeared from nowhere at the swing of his wand. Gothel on the other hand pointed her wand at the rest who were caught in a deadly purple light that drained from them into her philosopher's stone. The men cried out at first but soon their voices became nothing but dry whispers as their skin dried and their bodies thinned, leaving nothing but skin and skeleton behind.

Jack and Hiccup attempted to dive at them but a snow globe portal opened in front of them and they dived straight through them into the Great Hall. The other four and Elinor all appeared too, falling through their own portal.

'What's happening?' Rapunzel asked Professor North in confusion.

'I am getting you out of trouble,' North told them as they all got themselves back on their feet. 'We saw the Council arriving when the rest of the Dream Eaters vanished and I made decision to get you away,' North explained hurriedly as the people within the Hall warily looked out of windows to see what was going on. A moment later the calm voice of Pitch spoke into their minds.

'_You have all seen a portion of our power here tonight,_' he said smoothly, '_you know our Council alone could destroy you all. However, we are not cruel rulers and we are willing to give you the chance to leave this place with your lives._

'_If the group known as the Big Four come alone to each of our four members at dawn we will spare the rest of you. If even _one_ does not, you will all die here.'_

* * *

><p>'And now all we need do is wait,' Pitch said cheerily as the Council apparated back to the area overlooking the castle they had

stood on not long before. 'In a few hours we'll send a message into the four's heads and tell them where to find us and leave it to them'<p>

'We must remember to keep each area visible to the school,' Gothel said thoughtfully, 'There'll be no point in breaking the Guardian's will if they can't get a good view.'

'**And if the children don't come to us**,' Mordu rumbled while Terror hissed greedily through his teeth, '**we'll burn them all to the ground**.'

* * *

><p>'You must wait here until mood has settled down,' North told the six as they walked quietly into his office, Fred and Flynn looking concernedly at the four who wouldn't look at one another. During the battle they hadn't noticed receiving any injuries but now they had a chance to pause they realised that they were all covered in soot or grime. Rapunzel was now walking with a pronounced limp and Jack's arm had a certain singed look to it while the rest had several cuts and bruises marked along their bodies and faces but none made a complaint.<p>

The headmaster waved his wand and comfortable looking cushions appeared in the room and settled on the floor.

'This should keep you comfortable,' he stated, 'I must leave to prepare everyone for dawn. Spend some time resting and you will feel much better I promise.'

With that the Headmaster left the six alone with a sympathetic glance behind him. They sat down together on the cushy pillows the professor had summoned for them in absolute silence. Around the walls of the room the portraits of all the previous headmasters were empty; clearly they knew when to give people privacy.

'So what's this about then?' Fred asked when no one else seemed inclined to speak. 'You can't honestly think getting yourselves killed would stop us fighting, or that the Council would keep to their word.'

'It's not that simple Fred,' Merida began as the four kept their gazes away from one another.

'What's not simple? We're not letting any of you do this!' Flynn said angrily.

'There's something we haven't told you,' Rapunzel interrupted before the two could say anything more. 'In our fifth year the four of us were shown a prophecy by the Guardians. In that prophecy we were told that we could be the ones to defeat the Council.'

'Great,' Fred said stubbornly, 'so what's the problem?'

'The prophecy says that the four of us can achieve incredible power to defeat the Council, but at a price,' Hiccup continued. 'For our magic to grow one of us has to sacrifice their life for the sake of the others.'

'_One must die so the others may live_', Jack quoted bitterly, 'and this looks like it's it. This is the moment where one of us can sacrifice their life so the others can become more powerful and stop the rest of Pitch's army. The one of us that goes will be killed and when Pitch's army comes for the rest of Hogwarts the surviving three will have the power to stop them.'

'You don't have to, we'll find another way,' Flynn began but was cut off by Merida.

'Everything else that was said in the prophecy came true and now it looks like we've arrived at the moment,' she said.

'Okay, then which of you is going to do it?' Fred asked in a defiant tone, looking hard at each of them.

'I will,' they replied together before looking between one another in confusion.

'I'm not letting you die for me,' Hiccup said to Jack, gripping his arm tightly as if to ensure Jack wasn't going anywhere.

'And I don't want you to die,' Jack returned stubbornly, 'how could I forgive myself?'

'We're not exactly going to stand idly by if you try it either,' Flynn said to Merida and Rapunzel while motioning to himself and Fred.

'Yeah, how's it fair on any of us if one of you die?' Fred said, both normal and magical eye entirely focused on Merida. 'It would still feel like losing.'

'Then what do we do?' Merida asked, realising the truth of what Fred had said, that none of them would let the others die.

'We keep on fighting without the help of the prophecy,' Jack said, nodding as the same realisation came to him. 'Prepare ourselves for the Council's armies at dawn.'

'Right now we need to rest,' Fred said, 'there's no point to any of this if we're not at our strongest tomorrow.'

'We can't all stay up here,' Merida pointed out, 'there's only room enough for two of us.'

'Flynn and I can go to the Hospital Wing,' Rapunzel suggested. 'I'll tend to anyone who needs it, and _then_ I'll go to sleep,' she said to the look Flynn gave her, 'I'll still have plenty of rest.'

'I can stay with the animals,' Hiccup suggested, 'They could probably need me to stand with them anyway.'

'Will there be anyone to keep you protected?' Jack asked, rewriting the question in his head to '_Will anyone be there to keep an eye on you?_'

'Don't worry; the animals won't let me leave their sight. They like me too much to let me get killed too soon,' Hiccup said, answering the real question he could see in Jack's eyes.

'I guess I could hang out with Professor North and the rest of the Guardians,' Jack suggested when everyone looked at him. 'You'll be able to go with me until I go in the Great Hall,' he reminded Hiccup who was asking himself the same question Jack had been.

'Then that leaves us in here,' Fred said to Merida, 'not a bad place to sleep, I've got to say.'

'So no more thinking about this stupid prophecy,' Flynn reminded them as he and Rapunzel began to get up to leave. 'We're such a great team we won't need it.'

After that the three couples headed their separate ways. Merida and Fred stayed in North's office and found a small bedroom in one of the side passages where they could sleep.

Rapunzel and Flynn travelled to the Hospital Wing where they met Professor Maximus who had been assisting Madam Pomfrey by bringing in the most wounded during the battle. Soon they were doing what they could for the steady flow of injured until the flow stopped and they had a chance to rest in the Hospital office where small beds had been set up.

Hiccup and Jack walked down the old stone network of stairs and corridors until they reached the point where they would split up, one going into the Great Hall and the other outside to the animals.

'I love you,' Hiccup said as they stood between the Great Hall and the entrance to the courtyard.

'I love you too,' Jack said simply as he pulled Hiccup in for a kiss that seemed to last far longer than it did. They stayed together even after breaking the kiss, their foreheads touching as they both thought to themselves how it felt like the final kiss.

As Hiccup went out to Toothless and the other waiting animals Jack went inside and was noticed how the sad and tired faces of everyone in the Hall, adults and students alike, watched him as he walked passed. He saw where North and the rest of the Guardians were standing or sitting and walked over to a spot near them. He could feel the stairs on his back as people watched him go, probably wondering whether he and the others were worth the risk.

'How did it go Jack?' North asked softly as Jack came close enough to talk.

'We've agreed what we always would,' Jack said, summoning up as much coolness as he could, 'that we're sticking together and ignoring anything the Council says.'

North patted his shoulder sympathetically and smiled. 'You're not as dumb as you look mate,' Bunnymund called over to him which made him smile.

'Whatever, we're all trying to get some rest now so I'd appreciate it if you didn't start playing your didgeridoo,' he joked as he stretched and found a corner to curl up in. For once Bunnymund didn't rise to the bait and Jack really felt the seriousness of the situation as he twirled his staff and summoned a sheet of snow to

fall around him which became a blanket and soon he had closed his eyes and nodded off.

* * *

><p>Merida waited a few hours after Fred had gone to sleep before quietly getting out from the covers of the bed and slipping out of the room without a sound. She padded through the dimly lit office and was about to sneak through the exit when she spotted the dark figure of the Sorting Hat sitting on a high shelf.<p>

Pausing for a moment she reached up and took it from its perch and placed it on her head. '_You've been around for a long time,'_ she thought to the hat, '_so if you know any way to help us, _please_ tell me.'_

The hat gave no reply but instead Merida felt a heavy object hit her on the head, making stars appear in front of her eyes. Lifting the hat off, she reached into it and pulled out a long sword by the silver, ruby-embossed hilt. She looked at it, puzzled, until she saw the writing _Godric Gryffindor_ etched into the side of the blade and understood.

'A good weapon to die with,' she said to herself as she descended the stairs that led out of the office.

* * *

><p>Rapunzel had also waited until Flynn's breathing had grown as deep as it ever would before departing. Madam Pomfrey and Professor Maximus had fallen asleep in separate made up beds and Rapunzel guessed they wouldn't be woken for some time. What she hadn't anticipated was that Pascal had stayed awake too to keep an eye on her.<p>

'Ah! Pascal what have I told you about sticking your tongue in my ear to wake me up,' Flynn hissed angrily, making Rapunzel start. At Pascal's urgent squeaking Flynn turned hurriedly and saw Rapunzel frozen in the doorway. Rapunzel felt a moment's dizziness and staggered to lean on the door for a moment before turning back to Flynn and Pascal.

'What did youâ€|?' Flynn asked in confusion as he stood up from the bed but was stopped a moment later as Rapunzel shot a _patrificus totalus_ spell at him, causing him and Pascal to collapse immobilized on the bed.

'I'm sorry you guys,' Rapunzel whispered as she limped out of the Wing, 'I love you both.'

* * *

><p>Hiccup had never really slept but instead spent much of the night debating with the animals of the Forbidden Forest. He knew they would not want him to go but also knew he could convince them to let him. What had been the problem was that they wished to join him which Hiccup had fought strongly against. He didn't want any of them, least of all Toothless, to die with him. But no matter how fervently he argued, the animals and Toothless argued back. Toothless would not leave his side and the other all spoke their decisions.<p>

'I'm not letting you die alone Hiccup,' Farris had said. 'The centaurs all owe you a bond of friendship. If you are to die, my men and I will stand with you until the end.'

'My people are in agreement Hiccup' Aggregor clicked, 'we may not be willing to die with you but we will watch over you.'

Gavin, Sting, Sickie and the rest of the none-speaking animals simply watched him with glowing eyes that spoke volumes in the night.

Toothless just looked at him with the sort of sarcastic humour he had when they had first become friends. The dragon waved his artificial tail fin at Hiccup as if presenting evidence A of why he would die with him, because they were only complete together.

'Okay bud,' Hiccup said to Toothless as he got into his saddle, 'I understand. Let's go and save them all.'

* * *

><p>Jack hadn't had much sleep either. He had never actually sat down on the floor but instead, at the moment he had created that snow blanket, he had created a copy of himself from crushed snow and ice. He'd practiced the spell for some time to get it right, never thinking he'd use it like this.<p>

Jack headed to where Pitch was waiting for him in the knowledge that no one would have realised he was gone until it was too late to stop him. He couldn't help but smile to himself at the thought, no wonder he was called the Winter Trickster.

* * *

><p>As the four made their way to their waiting enemies, Flynn, with Pascal on his shoulder, burst into the Headmaster's office, waking Fred in the next room with a start.<p>

'What's happening?' Fred asked in alarm as he sprang out of bed, expecting an attack. 'Where's Merida?'

'Rapunzel's gone too but that's not all,' Flynn said as Pascal squeaked and jumped erratically at his shoulder.

'The prophecy,' Flynn continued at a shocked Fred as they ran out and down the corridor, hoping they might get to the four before it was too late, 'The damn prophecy was incomplete!'

It was too late for the two, however, as the four had made it to their destinations.

* * *

><p>'Ah Jack,' Pitch said as he and a large wave of Nightmares arrived at the top of the Astronomy tower while Jack flew onto its roof to meet him, 'how nice to see you.'<p>

People began to swarm beneath them, pointing into the air as they spotted the two figures in front of the dark horde of

Nightmares.

Before Jack could make a reply Pitch raised his wand at the boy's heart and spoke the two deadly words.

* * *

><p>Hiccup and Toothless flew above the small group of animals who remained at the edge of the Forbidden Forest and watched as Terror rose from the shattered remains of the quidditch pitch to meet them. The people inside the castle who looked out of windows to see the tiny speck that the two were compared with the massive bulk of Terror could only gasp as they saw Terror's large mouth open and breathe dark flames that would consume the boy and his dragon.<p>

* * *

><p>'Rapunzel, I'm glad to see your punctuality has improved,' Gothel laughed as Rapunzel slowly walked with a straight back towards the Herbology greenhouses, trying to hide her limp as best she could. The plants inside all looked wilted and decayed, clearly Gothel had been having an appetizer. People began to pour out from the large doorway that led to the greenhouses, shouting something that Rapunzel couldn't hear.<p>

Rapunzel wondered what it felt like as the Philosophers stone at Gothel's neck began to glow its deadly purple.

* * *

><p>'Have you come to face your destiny false queen?' Mordu asked mockingly as he and Merida stood on a patch of the grounds that was clearly visible to the people in the Great Hall. '**I wouldn't want my ascension to go unwitnessed,**' the bear added smugly as people began to appear at the windows of the Hall, watching them in horror.

'Let's just finish this,' Merida said, planting the sword in the ground in front of her and holding the hilt with both hands. Ready for the final blow that Mordu reared up on his powerful legs to deliver, swinging his huge claws in a wide arc that met her body at the side.

* * *

><p>To the horror of the various onlookers who spotted the four in their different parts of the school grounds, the sun began to rise in an orange and red glow.<p>

As the light of the new day touched the school, all four killing blows met their targets.

* * *

><p>The End.

Ha, just kidding :P

**Keep an eye out for the final chapter in the series which I hope to upload within a couple of days. **

****Until then, thanks for your reviews and I'll see you all on the other side :)****

29. The End

****The End****

Flynn's memory repeated constantly through his head as the dawn began spreading an orange glow over the school's walls while he and Fred ran down the Grand Staircase.

He'd woken with a start at the unpleasant feeling he'd come to associate with Pascal's tongue zipping into his ear. When he looked around he saw Rapunzel standing frozen at the door and began to struggle out of bed to confront her when she went rigid and stared into the ceiling, her eyes glowing as two miniature suns, the same shape as the ones Rapunzel drew into her art, appeared in her eyes.

'_The power of the four was awakened by the sacrifice of one life for the lives of the others but the power could never be sustained with only one sacrifice. When the choice must be made at the sun's rise, all four must sacrifice their lives for one another, without knowing it. Only then will the power truly awaken within them and protect them from death as it has once before. Only then will the Dark Council fall!_'_

With that Rapunzel stumbled for a moment, leaning on the door to keep her balance. Flynn began to ask her what she meant but it seemed she didn't remember speaking as she paralysed him and Pascal a moment later.

Flynn could only hope that Rapunzel and the others were okay. That by some miracle they hadn't gone to die or, if they had, that they had _all_ gone, because then they might have a chance.

* * *

><p>The killing blows struck.<p>

Great towers of golden light roared up from around the four as they did. Pitch's killing curse broke over it like glass while Gothel's draining magic failed to connect and snapped away from the pillar of light, making Gothel reel back in alarm. Terror's flames began to fade around Hiccup and Toothless's tower while Mordu roared in pain as his paw was deflected away when it came into contact with Merida's light.

The towers seared higher into the sky, making the crowds beneath them gasp, and then curved towards one another, meeting in the middle between them and dissipating, revealing the four who stood in their centres.

'Well Pitch,' Jack stated to a horrified looking Pitch as the icy blue light in his staff glowed stronger than ever before, 'it looks like you're in trouble.'

With that he gripped his staff in both hands and swung at Pitch. He

felt the power coursing through him and his staff as he summoned the winds at its tip, hitting Pitch and his Nightmares head on and sending them flying away. The gales hit with such force that the trees as far in as the centre of the Forbidden Forest shook with their fury and Pitch had been hit full on with them.

Gasping for breath as his Nightmares rallied behind him and slowed him down Pitch managed to gasp out, 'Attack, kill them all!'

His Dream Eaters and many Nightmares obeyed him immediately and descended onto the crowds that had been watching the events with awe. Shouts and spell blasts began to fill the air again as Jack floated serenely towards Pitch who watched him with no less than pure hatred.

'Want another go?' Jack asked before Pitch struck.

* * *

><p>'How? How is this possible?' Gothel shrieked with rage as she stared in fury at Rapunzel whose short brown hair and skin seemed to be glowing with a faint golden light.<p>

'No matter,' she continued as Rapunzel didn't reply as she was too focused watching in awe as the wounds she'd sustained last night began to vanish with the golden glow, 'I've fed my stone with the lives of countless wizards. If I can't have your life, then I'll just take it!'

With that Gothel pointed her wand at Rapunzel and sent a curse flying at her heart. Rapunzel blocked it with barely a thought, raising her wand as if she had all the time in the world. This enraged Gothel further, causing her philosopher's stone to glow with dark purple light as she tapped into its magic and fired a second, far more powerful spell that Rapunzel met with one of her own. The two spells met together with a flash of purple and gold light, created a shockwave between the two women that made Gothel fall back but merely made Rapunzel stumble.

Soon Gothel was back up on her feet and sending powerful spells fuelled by the energy of her stone at Rapunzel who blocked and defended every one before waving her wand, causing everything around them, from large blocks of rubble to small shards of glass, for many feet to rise into the air as if invisible strings that connected them to the ground had been cut. Rapunzel pointed her wand at Gothel and sent them all at her, forcing them women to create a shield around herself to protect from the impacts.

When it was over, Gothel sneered angrily at Rapunzel and retaliated with more spells that Rapunzel allowed to hit her without raising her wand in defence. Gothel laughed in triumph but then screamed again as the wounds that she had inflicted on Rapunzel faded away into nothing mere seconds after they had been made.

'Sorry Gothel but you can't hurt me anymore,' Rapunzel told her as she raised her wand and began their duel again.

* * *

><p>Hiccup could feel the power flowing through him as he watched the

remains of Terror's flames sputter out around him and Toothless. He could also see himself and Toothless through the eyes of the animals beneath them and quickly sent them the thought that they should re-join the rest of the school continue in the fight. They obeyed him immediately and he marvelled when he saw through their eyes as they began to run back towards the castle.<p>

In front of them Terror roared in fury as they still flew before him after being hit with his attack. He lunged forward, opening his large jaws to swallow them whole.

'Ready bud?' Hiccup asked as the jaws began to close around them and was answered with a rumble from his dragon as Toothless flapped his wings once. They were immediately out of Terror's range, or so it seemed to Terror as they had travelled so fast they were barely a blur to him, moving faster than any dragon had moved before.

In his range the Red Death sent his dragon minions to attack the two, believing their number would compensate for the Night Fury's new speed. Hiccup merely raised his hand and the dragons around them stilled in their charge as a light returned to their eyes. To Terror's horror the minds of his minions slipped from his control so easily it was as if they had never belonged to him in the first place. With a wave of his hand Hiccup charged the dragons to go and aid in the battle at Hogwarts as well, now seeing from high above with their eyes, leaving Terror alone in the sky with him and Toothless.

* * *

><p>Mordu stared at Merida with his usual furious expression as the golden light disappeared from around her. She simply smiled back at him and took the sword of Godric Gryffindor by its hilt and drew it from the ground to look it over, holding it up to the light of dawn.<p>

'A good weapon to die with, but a better one to fight with,' she said to herself as she turned her head to look at Mordu before pointing the tip of the blade towards him in challenge.

The bear roared in anger and charged towards her, raising his paw to slam down upon her. Instead of dodging, Merida raised the sword and blocked his attack with the flat of the blade, sliding along the ground but not budging a muscle. Mordu was horrified, he had given himself the strength of ten men and no human should have the power to withstand a direct hit from one of his blows. And yet there stood Merida who blocked it without a sweat and now swung the blade with enough strength to knock Mordu off-balance as his arm was flung away by the swing. Merida brought her other arm round and pointed her wand directly at Mordu's chest so fast that the bear had no time to react as she calmly said, '_Stupefy._'

The power of the spell hit Mordu and knocked him several feet away onto his back, knocking all the breath from him as he landed. He staggered back onto his four feet and stared wildly at Merida who charged at him, wand and sword at the ready.

* * *

><p>'Looks like they all tried to be stupid heroes,' Fred said to

Flynn, half-angrily and half-gratefully, as they stood in the Great Hall while Dream Eaters began a second attack.<p>

The odds no longer seemed in their favour though as people had been rejuvenated by seeing the new power of the four against the Council and so returned to the fight with even greater strength, Flynn and Fred included.

They saw North go passed them, swinging his curved sword in one hand and firing spells from the other, and Whittler who was just a blur of knives passing through the Dream Eater hordes. Soon the animals returned to the battle from the outside, biting and cutting their way through while dragons attacked them from above, much to their horrified surprise.

'Those guys are going to owe us so badly when this is over,' Flynn laughed as he fired spells at Dream Eaters and as Pascal hid in one of his pockets.

'You two!' A voice called to them from the Dream Eaters, revealed to be a half-crazed looking Mulcaster. 'Why do and the rest of your stupid gang always have to ruin everything?' He yelled furiously as he began to fire spells at both of the boys who blocked and retaliated with spells of their own. Mulcaster blocked both of their attacks with flicks of his wands and then the real battle began between them, dodging and attacking in a two on one battle where Mulcaster's anger seemed to be granting him extra strength.

'Sorry Mulcaster,' Fred said mockingly as he blocked a curse, 'it's just your unlucky day.'

* * *

><p>Pitch had forsaken the rest of his remaining Nightmares in the battle, instead choosing to turn them into a vortex of black sand that supported him from the ground as he and Jack raced around one another.<p>

He sent two black whips of sand at Jack, hoping to wrap them around the boy's throat and pull him down, but Jack blocked them by creating a massive block of ice in front of him. He then threw the ice block towards Pitch and created several others around him with a flick of his staff that all fell towards Pitch who managed to dodge around most of them but was still caught and sent hurtling away by the force of the impact until his vortex could catch him again.

Gritting his teeth, Black shot hundreds of boulder sized chunks of sand at Jack who danced around them, the winds that supported him now so cold that a sheen of ice developed around the sand as it tumbled to the ground and shattered.

'Come on Pitch,' he goaded joyfully, 'surely you can do better than that.'

In response Black waved his arms over his head and summoned a giant mass of black sand that fell upon Jack like a tsunami and laughed in the belief he had won. Jack just grinned as the wave of sand fell down to him and thrust his staff forward into the black mass. Immediately Pitch's laughing stopped as the entire wave began to freeze over, the ice running faster and faster towards him until he

was knocked back by its arrival and by the shattering of the wave as the ice reduced it to nothing.

Jack wasn't done though as descended to where Pitch had been caught again by his vortex and spun his staff around, firing giant balls of what looked like flaming ice at Pitch who blocked and dodge away from them. Each ball caused an explosion as it met a solid object, the shockwaves having enough force to knock Pitch back even when hadn't been touched by it.

'This isn't possible,' he said to himself as he created a gigantic black scythe to slice at Jack who blocked it with his staff, causing ice to freeze any part of the scythe he touched. Another swing and Jack had made his way to close to Pitch for comfort, making him immediately turn to retreat backwards.

Jack jumped at the opportunity and urged the winds to propel him further through the air and landed on Pitch's back, driving the end of his staff into the man's back. Pitch had no time to react before an icy shockwave sent him hurtling down through his own sand which grazed him as he fell before he managed to rally them to catch him.

When he turned back to send an attack against Jack they boy wasn't above him but beside him, swinging his staff once more at Pitch. This time it wasn't just incredibly strong ice cold winds that hit Pitch but a wall of ice magic as well that destroyed the black sand around Pitch that scorched his skin and flung him away with his arms spread wide as if he were trying to catch the wall of power that hit him.

He landed onto the ground with a thump, scattering several fighters around as he did, and took a moment to stagger to his feet while Jack landed lightly onto the ground in front of him.

* * *

><p>Gothel and Rapunzel's battle had destroyed half of the greenhouses as Gothel's destructive spells ricocheted from Rapunzel's protective spells, unable to break through them. Rapunzel waved her wand and giant roots appeared from the ground, catching Gothel by the ankle and attempting to lift her into the air.<p>

Gothel yelled out angrily and the glow of her philosopher's stone glowed slightly more brightly as the roots around her withered and died at her touch. Turning on Rapunzel she sent a wave of magic at the girl who created a paper thin barrier between them and absorbed the wave without wavering for a moment.

'Damn you!' Gothel screamed as the stone at her throat began to pulse slowly, growing brighter with each beat. 'Even if I must use all the power I have taken I will end your miserable life!' She claimed furiously as the stone reached its brightest light.

She waved her wand and with it came all the power that remained in her stone which she directed to Rapunzel who was suddenly bombarded from all sides by the dark force, creating a barrier in the nick of time to protect herself. Gothel began to laugh as she saw Rapunzel's barrier shudder slightly under the strain of the collected energy from the stone, Rapunzel's face a mask of concentration.

Her laughter stopped as Rapunzel took a step forward, and then another. 'No!' She cried as she directed all of the energy between them, trying to force Rapunzel back.

It seemed the girl couldn't be stopped though as her barrier began to change to a golden light and she took another step closer. Gothel began to back away in fear as Rapunzel gained ground, the dark energy flowing around her like water. Another step and she and Gothel were almost touching, Rapunzel looking deeply into Gothel's horrified eyes.

Reaching out, Rapunzel let her hand pass through the protective barrier and reached out to Gothel who tried to grab her wrist but was too late. Rapunzel's hand closed around the shining stone at her neck, her own golden light dimming the light of the stone. Rapunzel's hand closed around the tightly, causing a cracking noise and black shards to fall between her fingers.

'What have you done?' Gothel asked in horror as the dark magic faded from her. She could feel all the years she had avoided rushing back to meet her now, causing her to age and wrinkle before Rapunzel's eyes. Gothel had the chance to watch as her hands withered away like the plants in the Herbology greenhouses before she crumbled away into dust, her robes flapping away in the breeze.

Rapunzel sighed and looked down at her clenched hand before opening it and letting what was left of the philosopher's stone fall away into nothingness.

* * *

><p>Hiccup and Toothless flew around Terror in a blur, hitting the dragon with fireballs that knocked the dragon through the air. They moved so fast that one moment they were hitting him from behind and then a second later they would hit him from the opposite direction.<p>

Hiccup was focused on more than just his own battle though. He followed the animals as they charged through the Dream Eater ranks, advising them on where to attack and assisting them to work together as a unit. It was like he was at the hub of a great hive mind where he didn't control but persuaded the animals to do as he asked.

He and Toothless were suddenly diving down upon Terror and hit the dragon on the top of the head with a blast so powerful that Terror was sent plummeting to the ground, crashing with a shock that shook the entire school.

'Okay Toothless,' he said, 'it's time to end this!'

With an agreeing noise from Toothless they dived down onto the dragon, appearing at his side as he tried to rise from the ground in seconds. They flew around until they faced Terror head on, the dragon's small eyes focusing on them as it raised its head.

'Come on then,' Hiccup called over to him while Toothless made a challenging call, 'give us your best shot!'

Terror roared and opened his mouth widely, revealing the orange glow

of fire climbing his throat until he breathed it out in a wide mass that would engulf them. Hiccup raised his wand and added his own magic to Toothless's fire which shot forward into Terror's inferno with such power that the larger dragon's flames billowed away from it as it went closer.

Terror's eyes had only a minute to register surprise before their flames burned their way through his and reached into his mouth, igniting the gas within. The next moment he was caught in his own fiery maelstrom as the gas within him exploded at once, consuming him in a moment and leaving nothing but a fiery explosion in his wake.

Hiccup and Toothless had flown far enough away by then to be unaffected by the blast and watched it instead from a safe distance.

* * *

><p>Merida slashed at Mordu with her sword, cutting into the bear's side before pointing her wand at him and sending him stumbling back with a spell. Mordu was back a second later, snapping at Merida with his large jaws which she jumped lightly away from before firing another spell that hit Mordu between the eyes and sent him skidding back along the grass.<p>

Mordu roared and charged again, biting down on Merida's shoulder before the girl could avoid him. Merida just smiled at him and twisted away, dragging the bear up slightly so she could hook her sword holding arm under him and effectively throw him away. Mordu looked up and snarled as he saw Merida's shoulder had been unharmed by his bite, the skin underneath her tattered cloths unbroken.

Mordu roared in challenge once more and reared on his hind legs as Merida came closer, swinging down with both paws at her head. Merida danced out of the way easily and jumped onto one of his large arms before he could move it away. He twisted and bit at her as she jumped further up to his shoulder, making her move out of the way and grab him around the neck with her wand arm. Mordu struggled against her; standing on two legs her smashed his back against the castle wall to dislodge her. Merida had jumped above him before his back had met the wall though and as he fell back onto his hind legs he suddenly had a very clear picture of what she would do.

In mid-air Merida gripped the hilt of the sword with both hands, her wand pointing down along its blade, and fell back to earth and back to Mordu. She sank the blade deeply into Mordu's back, firing a spell from her wand to hit into his hide and weaken him so she could sink the blade deep enough to reach his heart.

Mordu had only the chance to roar one final time before falling forward, dead. As Merida took the blade from his back and jumped down she looked back and saw with surprise a ghostly shaped peeling away from the bear's crumpled body.

The torso of a man formed in front of her, made from blue flames, and looked around in surprise. When he spotted her, the ghost of Mordu saw Merida with human eyes for the first time as she saw him as human for the first time. Without a word, the blue edged ghost nodded to Merida before condensing down into a wisp and disappearing, leaving

Merida to stare in wonder.

* * *

><p>Spells flashed between Flynn, Fred and Mulcaster as battles raged around them in the Great Hall. Even so they were given a wide berth as the ferocity of their duel had begun to crack the flagstones beneath their feet. Mulcaster sent twin bursts of green light at the two who dodged them before sending their own attacks in retaliation which Mulcaster blocked angrily.<p>

'When I'm done with you, I'm going to find your girlfriends and make them wish they'd never been born!' He gloated as more spells danced between them. 'And I'll teach that mudblood girl her place too, I'llâ€|GAH!' Mulcaster jumped into the air as Pascal, who had jumped from Flynn's pocket onto Mulcaster's robes, had just stuck his tongue in the boy's ear.

Fred and Flynn both took the opportunity of his distraction by hitting him with twin disarming spells, sending the boy flying into a wall which he slid down into a slumped position, groaning slightly.

'Good work Pascal,' Flynn said as he knelt down and picked the chameleon up, 'finally a good use for that trick.'

* * *

><p>'It's over Pitch,' Jack stated as he created an ice shield to block a wave of sand sent against him, 'surrender now and you'll be taken back to Azkaban.'<p>

'This fight isn't over yet Frost,' Pitch sneered disdainfully, sending a slicing wave of black sand at Jack's feet, causing the boy to tap the end of his staff to the ground and freeze it in place.

'You think that growing stronger will win this battle. I am Pitch Black, the Bogeyman, the Nightmare King, how could I _ever_ lose while there is fear and strife in this world?' Pitch raged before pointing his wand at Jack and intoning, '_Avada Kedavra!_'

Jack spun his staff in front of him, creating a circular pane of ice between them with a surface so smooth it acted as a mirror. When Pitch's killing curse hit it he could see himself reflected on its surface, as if the spell was hitting him in the heart instead of Jack. Suddenly he felt the blow the a spell as it rebounded on him and stepped back a few paces, looking in surprise as Jack released his mirror shield and let it shatter on the ground. He fell onto the ground, his face still a mask of surprise, even in death.

As Jack stood over the body he thought he should say something clever but knew that nothing was worth saying at this moment. Instead he turned away and walked back to Hogwarts where the sound of cheering had begun as the Dream Eaters had either fled or surrendered at the sight of their defeated masters.

* * *

><p>The power faded away like a sigh of relief, the four's relief on

returning to their old selves. As the four sat in the Great Hall they could feel it draining away now that its purpose was complete and knew that they preferred it that way, having all that power was great for a short time but they wouldn't have wanted to keep it.<p>

Everybody was celebrating now that the battle was over, sitting in groups around the Hall as house-elves began to hand out tea and coffee. The Guardians were all sitting together, North laughing with Bunnymund and Maximus while Toothiana and Whittler were having an animated conversation about where to visit for the summer.

The clans of the Scottish Highlands were all gathered together, making jokes and starting fights between one another. Elinor had to separate Fergus and the three lords several times over a single hour, pulling them away by their ears until they apologised.

The students were all looking at the damage the school had sustained with awe. Several were boasting about the craters they had managed to blow into the school while more were talking animatedly about the fights they won, many were already over exaggerating.

After giving their goodbyes to Hiccup the animals of the Forbidden Forest returned to the forest without joining in on the celebrations. The dragons that had been controlled by Terror were currently being rounded up by Berkians and taken back to the coastal village to join with the already established dragon colony.

'You guys know you owe us right?' Fred said as he leaned back on his makeshift chair of rubble.

'Yeah, we expect a big payment for having to go through undue stress,' Flynn joked beside him.

'I don't know if this'll help but one of the house-elves managed to find a box of Bertie Bott's every flavour beans for me,' Rapunzel said offering the two the box. 'Actually, why don't we have a game of Bertie Bott's fishing? We used to do it all the time when we wanted to celebrate something,' Rapunzel suggested to the agreement of everyone, even Hiccup although he groaned dramatically when he pulled a bean from the box.

'Okay, one, two, three,' Jack said when everyone had a bean. All of them bit into their beans together at his count and swallowed.

'Caramel,' Merida smiled.

'Butterscotch,' Fred said in a slightly muffled voice.

'Strawberry,' Rapunzel added.

'Cherry,' Flynn said.

'Walnut,' Jack said, licking his lips.

'Pineapple,' Hiccup finished to everyone's surprise.

'Oh my god Hiccup, you finally got a good one?' Rapunzel asked in delighted shock.

'Not really, I don't like pineapple,' Hiccup replied to an accompaniment of groans.

* * *

><p>Hiccup and Jack moved into Berk. Jack had really grown to like the small village during his time spent there and it was where Hiccup had wanted to stay.<p>

Jack had become an Auror. For the final part of his training he'd been assigned to shadow Harry Potter and had always wondered whether it had been intended or not. Much of the time he was assigned cases further up north but occasionally he would help further south when a former Dream Eater was being chased down.

Hiccup created a Dragon Academy on Berk to teach the Berkians on dragon taming, caring and rearing. He employed Astrid and the others as teachers and trainers, each specialising in their own dragon species. Under the Academy's influence the dragon population in Berk thrived and grew, teaching the world how to live in harmony with dragons.

Eventually, when the time was right, they adopted a son.

* * *

><p>Merida and Fred moved to Diagon Alley for a while, renting the flat above Weasley's Wizard Wheezes where Fred began to work with his father who began grooming him to take over the business when he was ready for retirement.<p>

Merida also began training to become an Auror but decided against it in the end. Instead she applied for the beater position with the Howling Harpies, now led by her old Quidditch Captain Alice, and was accepted nearly straight after the try-outs as she had easily outflown the other competitors. With her help the Harpies soon began to win match after match, finally winning the National Cup for the first time in the team's history. She'd got everybody free tickets for that match and they were cheering the loudest among the crowd when Merida's team was handed the cup.

She had to leave the team for a short time, however, as she had to give birth to her and Fred's twins.

* * *

><p>Rapunzel and Flynn spent two years exploring the world as they promised each other they would. They travelled mainly on foot and by apparition from the Americas to Africa and then on to Asia, camping under the stars whenever night fell.<p>

On returning, Flynn started off by helping Fred in the joke shop as they'd planned but eventually moved on when the position for Charms teacher opened up in Hogwarts. The position had never been truly filled after Sandy's death, instead having a new teacher appear every year, but Flynn changed that and soon became the permanent Charms teacher for Hogwarts.

Rapunzel, meanwhile, worked for Madam Pomfrey at Hogwarts while Flynn

was at the joke shop but was eventually sent to work at St Mungo's with a glowing reference from her old teacher. After a few years she was promoted to Healer-in-Charge of Spell Damage, making her one of the youngest Head-Healers in the hospital's history.

Eventually, she and Flynn had their own little golden haired son.

* * *

><p>Mulcaster and his father, along with many other accused Dream Eaters, were given life imprisonment in Azkaban. It is reported that Mulcaster still complains about this decades after his imprisonment.<p>

* * *

><p>Fifteen years later and the crowd at Platform 9 ¾ was packed, making it tricky for Hiccup, Jack and their son Jamie to weave Jamie's trolley through the milling people. Eventually they found a space and shot through it, nearly running into the rest of the group.<p>

'Whoa, steady on guys,' Fred said, waving his arm up in defence, 'you're going to get someone hurt.'

'Sorry everyone, the crowd was a nightmare,' Hiccup apologised as he bent down to check everything was alright on Jamie's trolley.

'And _someone_ wouldn't let me fly the trolley over,' Jack joked as he hugged Merida and Rapunzel.

Fred was talking to the twins who were both starting their first year. 'Now remember what I told you two,' he reminded them sternly.

'No copying other people's pranks because we need to prove ourselves,' Alice replied, speaking as if she had memorised the instructions.

'And always remember to tell people where we got the joke shop stuff,' Finn added in the same voice.

'Oh, I'm so proud of you,' Fred said, tugging his children into hugs which they desperately fought to get out of.

'I'm glad to see your parenting skills are still finely tuned,' Jack joked to him and Merida when he let the twins go and talk to Flynn and Rapunzel's son Sandy.

'Yeah, dad doesn't even let me feed fireworks to Swift Shock anymore,' Jamie said. He was entering his third year at the school and already growing like a weed.

'I don't think you should be doing that to your pet Night Fury,' Sandy stated as he walked over with the twins. He was taller than the rest as he was in his fourth year and had chosen to keep his golden hair cut short since his second.

'What? He loved it, he kept trying to reach for more through the bag,' Jamie explained with laughter.

At that moment the whistle for the train sounded and the children were hurried onto the train, hefting their luggage with them. Soon they all found an empty compartment to sit together in and wave to their parents from the open window.

They waved goodbye to their children until the Hogwarts Express turned a corner and was gone. Smiling and rubbing their eyes they walked out together, reminiscing about their old school days, good and bad, and feeling grateful that their children would only have to go through the good times.

The End.

* * *

><p>Thank you all for making it this far :D

I hope you like how it turned out and that you're not too sad it's over.

If anyone's interested I'll be starting a second story based on Supernatural soon, so look out for that.

Thank you all for sticking with me to the end and thank you for all the favourites and reviews you've given me over these few months.

Goodbye for now then :)

End
file.